



COMBATING TERRORISM CENTER AT WEST POINT

# CTC SENTINEL

OBJECTIVE . RELEVANT . RIGOROUS

## Contents

### FEATURE ARTICLE

#### 1 **Riyaz Bhatkal and the Origins of the Indian Mujahidin**

By Praveen Swami

### REPORTS

#### 5 **Salafi-Jihadi Activism in Gaza: Mapping the Threat**

By Benedetta Berti

#### 10 **The Virtual Jihad: An Increasingly Legitimate Form of Warfare**

By Akil N. Awan

#### 13 **Internet Jihadists React to the Deaths of Al-Qa`ida's Leaders in Iraq**

By Abdul Hameed Bakier

#### 15 **The Kidnapping and Execution of Khalid Khwaja in Pakistan**

By Rahimullah Yusufzai

#### 17 **The Sources of the Abu Sayyaf's Resilience in the Southern Philippines**

By Rommel C. Banlaoi

#### 20 **Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity**

#### 24 **CTC Sentinel Staff & Contacts**

## About the CTC Sentinel

The Combating Terrorism Center is an independent educational and research institution based in the Department of Social Sciences at the United States Military Academy, West Point. The CTC Sentinel harnesses the Center's global network of scholars and practitioners to understand and confront contemporary threats posed by terrorism and other forms of political violence.

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not of the U.S. Military Academy, the Department of the Army, or any other agency of the U.S. Government.

# Riyaz Bhatkal and the Origins of the Indian Mujahidin

By Praveen Swami



The aftermath of the German Bakery bombing in the Indian city of Pune in February 2010. - Photo by Barcroft Media via Getty Images

IN THE SUMMER of 2004, a group of young Indian Muslim men gathered for a retreat at one of the sprawling villas that line the cheerfully-named Jolly Beach, the pride of the small, south Indian fishing town of Bhatkal. They swam, went for hikes in the woods, honed their archery skills, and occasionally engaged in target practice with an airgun. Local residents recall occasionally hearing small explosions, but presumed the men were setting off fireworks. Nothing the men did gave Bhatkal's police cause for concern. The police, however, were unaware that the men on Jolly Beach composed the core team of the jihadist network that would soon be known as the Indian Mujahidin. Long before the network adopted that name, the men from Jolly Beach executed a succession of bomb attacks beginning in 2005, killing hundreds across India.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Minutes before bombs exploded outside court buildings in the Indian cities of Lucknow, Varanasi and Faizabad on

Today, the Indian Mujahidin has been implicated in a number of attacks in India, and there are signs that the group could become increasingly dangerous due to its growing collaboration with Lashkar-i-Tayyiba (LT, or LeT) in Pakistan. The expansion of this network could pose a serious challenge to regional stability in South Asia.

November 23, 2007, the group e-mailed a manifesto to the media that for the first time identified itself as the Indian Mujahidin. The letter, reprinted in its exact form below, stated that the attacks were carried out to protest "the pathetic condition of muslims in India that idol worshipers can kill our brothers, sisters, children and outrage dignity of our sisters at any place and at any time and we can't resist them. AL-HUM-DU-LILLAH now we are prepared enough to retaliate...Only Islam has the power to establish a civilized society and this could be only possible in Islamic rule, which could be achieved by only one path JIHAD-FEE-SABILILLAH."

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE <b>MAY 2010</b>		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2010 to 00-00-2010</b>	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>CTC Sentinel. Volume 3, Issue 5, May 2010. Riyaz Bhatkal and the Origins of the Indian Mujahidin</b>				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>U.S. Military Academy, Combating Terrorism Center, 607 Cullum Road, Lincoln Hall, West Point, NY, 10996</b>				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT <b>Same as Report (SAR)</b>	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>24</b>	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

Prosecutors in New Delhi charge that the principal organizers of the Jolly Beach gathering were Riyaz Ismail Shahbandri (also known as Riyaz Bhatkal) and his brother Iqbal. Most of the men at Jolly Beach knew each other only by aliases, but Indian intelligence officials believe that the gathering included the Bhatkal brothers, Abdul Subhan Qureshi, and the key figures responsible for the physical execution of bombings in northern India, Mohammad Sadiq Israr Sheikh and Atif Amin. Documents filed in Indian courts allege that the men played a key role in recruiting operatives, sourcing bomb components and organizing attacks. Furthermore, according to recent statements attributed to Pakistani-American jihadist David Coleman Headley (also known as Daood Gilani),<sup>2</sup> the Shahbandri brothers now lead the “Karachi Project,”<sup>3</sup> an alleged LT operation to train and equip Indian jihadists for attacks in India.<sup>4</sup> The bombing of the German Bakery in Pune on February 13, 2010, for example, may have been part of this project; one of the suspected bombers was Riyaz Shahbandri’s lieutenant, Mohammad Zarar Siddi Bawa, known as Yasin Bhatkal, who was also present at Jolly Beach.<sup>5</sup>

This article provides an overview of Riyaz Shahbandri’s journey into India’s nascent jihadist movement, while also providing insight into the origins of the Indian Mujahidin and how its collaboration with the LT is a growing threat to the region.

2 David Coleman Headley was arrested in October 2009 in the United States. He faced a number of charges in the United States, from involvement in the November 2008 Mumbai attacks to plotting against employees at a newspaper in Denmark that published caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad. He pleaded guilty to multiple charges in March 2010 and is reportedly cooperating with U.S. authorities on providing intelligence information.

3 For more specific details on the Karachi Project, see Animesh Roul, “After Pune, Details Emerge on the Karachi Project and its Threat to India,” *CTC Sentinel* 3:4 (2010).

4 Shishir Gupta, “ISI, LeT Getting Indian Jihadis Together in Karachi for Attack,” *Indian Express*, February 1, 2010.

5 This information is based on police review of closed-circuit surveillance footage. For details, see “IM Leader Yasin Bhatkal Mastermind of Pune Blasts, Claims ATS,” *Daily News and Analysis*, April 8, 2010.

#### Riyaz Shahbandri’s Early Life

Riyaz Shahbandri’s father, Ismail Shahbandri, left Bhatkal approximately three decades ago, hoping to make his fortune in Mumbai. He established a successful leather-tanning business in Mumbai’s Kurla area, and eventually purchased an apartment in Kardar Building off the busy Pipe Road—an impossible dream for most city migrants.<sup>6</sup> Ismail Shahbandri’s prosperity ensured that his son, Riyaz, who was born in 1976, was able to study at local English-medium schools, and later civil engineering at Mumbai’s

### “The Jolly Beach meeting would serve as a key planning gathering before the group executed a series of increasingly lethal bombings.”

Saboo Siddiqui Engineering College. In 2002, Riyaz married a Bhatkal-area woman, Nashua Ismail, the daughter of an electronics store owner. By this time, however, Riyaz’s story had begun to diverge significantly from the trajectory his businessman father had likely mapped for him.

Shafiq Ahmad, Riyaz’s brother-in-law to be, lived in the family’s apartment as he pursued his studies in Mumbai. Shafiq, however, was also an activist in the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), an Islamic youth organization, and eventually rose to become the head of the group’s Mumbai chapter. Set up in 1977 by the Jamaat-i-Islami Hind organization, the Indian branch of the largest Islamist grouping in South Asia, SIMI was the group’s student wing. SIMI, however, was disowned by its founders five years later due to its increasingly inflammatory rhetoric, which was viewed as pushing Jamaat-

6 Biographical details on the Shahbandri family derive in part from Riyaz Shahbandri’s police dossier: “Riyaz Ismail Shahbandri @ Riyaz Bhatkal,” Maharashtra Police Anti-Terrorism Squad, September 30, 2008. Material was also gathered by the author during interviews of relatives and friends of the family during multiple visits to Mumbai and Bhatkal between October 2008 and April 2010.

i-Islami Hind into confrontation with the Indian government.<sup>7</sup> SIMI sought to re-establish the caliphate, without which it felt the practice of Islam would remain incomplete. Muslims comfortable living in secular societies, its pamphlets warned, were destined for hell. Ideologies other than Islam were condemned as false and sinful.<sup>8</sup> After Hindu fundamentalists demolished a mosque in the north Indian town of Ayodhya in 1992, SIMI began to call for direct action. SIMI President Shahid Badr Falahi demanded that “Muslims organize themselves and stand up to defend the community.”<sup>9</sup>

Later in the decade, SIMI’s polemic became increasing venomous. In a 1996 statement, SIMI declared that since democracy and secularism had failed to protect Muslims, the sole option was to struggle for the caliphate.<sup>10</sup> Soon after, it put up posters calling on Muslims to follow the path of the 11th century conqueror Mahmood Ghaznavi, and appealed to God to send down a latter-day avatar to avenge the destruction of mosques in India.<sup>11</sup> The organization was finally proscribed after the 9/11 attacks in the United States when SIMI activists organized demonstrations in support of al-Qa`ida chief Usama bin Ladin, hailing him as a “true mujahid.”<sup>12</sup>

Due to Shafiq’s SIMI activism, Riyaz began to spend time at SIMI’s offices in Mumbai around 2001 at the peak of the organization’s radical phase, associating with men who would play key roles in the development of the jihadist movement in India. Among them were: Abdul Subhan Qureshi and Mohammad Sadiq Israr Sheikh, who

7 For a superb account of SIMI’s history, see Yoginder Sikand, “Islamist Assertion in Contemporary India: The Case of the Students Islamic Movement of India,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 23:2 (2003). Also see Irfan Ahmad, *Islamism and Democracy in India* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2010).

8 “Interview with [SIMI President] Shahid Badr Falahi,” *Afkar-i Milli* [New Delhi], November 2000.

9 Sikand, “Islamist Assertion in Contemporary India: The Case of the Students Islamic Movement of India.”

10 Sayyed Abdul Bari, *Azad Hindustan Main Muslim Tanzimein* (New Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies, 2001), p. 305.

11 Anita Verma, “India Urgently Needs a Ghaznavi: SIMI Chief,” *The Asian Age* [New Delhi], March 29, 2001.

12 Sikand, “Islamist Assertion in Contemporary India: The Case of the Students Islamic Movement of India.”

would co-found the Indian Mujahidin along with Riyaz Shahbandri; Ehtesham Siddiqi, who is now being tried for his alleged role in the bombings of Mumbai's suburban train system in July 2006; and Rahil Sheikh, who recruited dozens of Maharashtra jihadists, most notably for an abortive 2006 terrorist strike in Gujarat to avenge the anti-Muslim violence that had taken place there four years earlier.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to his role in SIMI, Riyaz's worldview also appears to have been shaped by his brother, Iqbal. Iqbal's adult life took a rather different course from that of his brother. He studied Unani medicine, a form of traditional healing based on Greek, Arab and Indian practices that has some currency across South Asia.<sup>14</sup> Yet Iqbal's primary interests were religious. Although it does not appear he received a formal education in theology, Iqbal was an enthusiastic participant in the activities of Tablighi Jama'at, a neo-fundamentalist Islamic proselytizing order whose annual gatherings at Raiwind in Pakistan are reputed to draw more followers than any Muslim congregation other than the Hajj pilgrimage.<sup>15</sup>

Later in his life, Iqbal appears to have been drawn to the work of the controversial neo-fundamentalist Mumbai-based doctor-turned-teleevangelist, Zakir Naik.<sup>16</sup> Naik has never been found to be involved in violence, but his words have lit up the imagination of diverse jihadists—among them New York taxi driver Najibullah Zazi, who pleaded guilty in the United States in February 2010 for plotting to attack New York City's Grand Central Station, among other targets.<sup>17</sup> Zazi reportedly "became enchanted" with Naik's preaching.<sup>18</sup>

Naik's Islamic Research Foundation (IRF), which was listed as an approved theological resource on the LT-affiliated Jama'at-ud-Da'wa website, has proved a magnet for LT operatives and many rank-and-file SIMI members. Rahil Sheikh, a key LT organizer who allegedly assembled a jihadist network that sought to execute terrorist strikes in the state of Gujarat, recruited cadre at the 2003 Srinagar convention of the Salafi Jamaat Ahl-e-Hadis, where Naik was a speaker.<sup>19</sup> Sheikh's associate, Feroze Deshmukh, who is being tried on multiple terrorism-related charges in Mumbai, worked as a librarian at the IRF.<sup>20</sup>

Naik has made various speeches that could result in radicalization. In one speech, he said, "If he [Bin Ladin] is fighting the enemies of Islam, I am for him. If he is terrorizing America the terrorist—the biggest terrorist—I am with him."<sup>21</sup> Naik concluded, "Every Muslim should be a terrorist. The thing is, if he is terrorizing a terrorist, he is following Islam."<sup>22</sup> When interviewed by reporters after Najibullah Zazi's arrest, Naik insisted, "I have always condemned

terrorism, because according to the glorious Koran, if you kill one innocent person, then you have killed the whole of humanity."<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, ideas such as these were profoundly attractive to angry young Muslim men in the years after the anti-Muslim violence that tore apart the state of Gujarat in 2002. For

**"For Riyaz and the men who would form the Indian Mujahidin, their anti-India jihadist project represented a response to the political challenges confronting their communities, not an abstract global cause."**

Riyaz and the men who would form the Indian Mujahidin, their anti-India jihadist project represented a response to the political challenges confronting their communities, not an abstract global cause.

In 2001, Riyaz's SIMI links to ganglord Aftab Ansari brought him into contact with well-known organized crime figure Asif Raza Khan, a year before Khan was killed in a shootout with the Gujarat police.<sup>24</sup> Authorities believe that Riyaz looked to Khan to use crime to fund jihadist operations.<sup>25</sup> Following Asif Khan's death in 2002, his brother, Amir Raza Khan, set up the Asif Raza Commando Force, a jihadist group dedicated to the memory of his brother. Amir Khan, who is linked to a welter of jihadist operations including an attack on the U.S. Consulate in Kolkata, allegedly provided passports and funds to facilitate the training of several Indian Mujahidin members in Pakistan.<sup>26</sup> In

13 For details of the role of Abdul Subhan Qureshi, also known as Tauqir, and Sadiq Israr Sheikh, see "Final Form Report Under Section 173, Code of Criminal Procedure in the Court of Kaveri Baweja, Chief Metropolitan Magistrate," New Delhi Police Special Cell, November 2010. For background on the 2006 Mumbai train bombings, including the role of Ehtesham Siddiqi, see Prerana Thakurdesai, "How the Case was Cracked," *India Today*, October 16, 2006. For details on the Aurangabad case, its links to the 2008 Mumbai attacks, and the role of Rahil Sheikh, see Praveen Swami, "Investigators Put Face to Voice on Mumbai Attack Tapes," *Hindu*, February 10, 2010.

14 Biographical details on the Shahbandri family derive in part from Riyaz Shahbandri's police dossier: "Riyaz Ismail Shahbandri @ Riyaz Bhatkal," Maharashtra Police Anti-Terrorism Squad, September 30, 2008. Material was also gathered by the author during interviews of relatives and friends of the family during multiple visits to Mumbai and Bhatkal between October 2008 and April 2010.

15 For background on Tablighi Jama'at and its belief system, see Yoginder Sikand, *The Origins and Development of the Tablighi Jamaat, 1920-2000* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2002). Tablighi Jama'at is a non-violent organization, yet some of its members have been involved in terrorist operations, usually because they have had dual memberships in a more violent cell or group.

16 For example, inside Bhatkal-area Indian Mujahidin safehouses raided by the Karnataka Police in October 2008, investigators found an abundance of pro-Taliban videos and Naik speeches.

17 On Najibullah Zazi, see David Von Drehle and Bobby Ghosh, "An Enemy Within: The Making of Najibullah Zazi," *Time Magazine*, October 1, 2009.

18 Ibid.

19 Praveen Swami, "New Proof on Mumbai Blasts," *Hindu*, August 1, 2006.

20 S. Husain Zaidi, "First Clues from Chat Room," *Indian Express*, September 30, 2006.

21 Zakir Naik, "Every Muslim Should be a Terrorist," speech in English available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bxk5AAA5FbI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bxk5AAA5FbI), undated.

22 Ibid.

23 Drehle and Ghosh.

24 For details, see "Riyaz Ismail Shahbandri @ Riyaz Bhatkal," Maharashtra Police Anti-Terrorism Squad, September 30, 2008.

25 Ibid. Mumbai police records show criminal proceedings were first initiated against Riyaz in 2002 for the extortion-related attempt to murder Kurla businessman Deepak Farsanwalla.

26 "Final Form Report Under Section 173, Code of Criminal Procedure in the Court of Kaveri Baweja, Chief Metropolitan Magistrate," New Delhi Police Special Cell, November 2010, p. 48.



May 2003, Mumbai police investigators say that Riyaz and Ehtesham Siddiqi held the first of a series of meetings, some involving Khan, to discuss the prospect of using Nepal as a base to train jihadists.<sup>27</sup> Nothing came of this plan, but Riyaz is alleged to have used Khan's funds to send several operatives for training in Pakistan.<sup>28</sup>

By 2004, Riyaz had succeeded in tapping diverse sources to put together an organization committed to jihadist violence within India. The Jolly Beach meeting would serve as a key planning gathering before the group executed a series of increasingly lethal bombings.

### The Origins and Formation of the Indian Mujahidin

Information on the early years of the Indian Mujahidin has been drawn from Sadiq Israr Sheikh, the only founding member of the group in custody.<sup>29</sup> Like Riyaz and Iqbal, Sheikh was born in a family that had migrated to Mumbai.<sup>30</sup> Beginning in 1996, he began attending SIMI meetings near his home in Mumbai's Cheeta Camp area. Perhaps drawn by the sense of purpose, SIMI appeared to provide many young Muslims in Mumbai a calling when the relationship between Hindus and Muslims became increasingly strained due to communal violence. According to police, Sheikh grew tired of SIMI's polemics and was in search of a more effective medium to turn his beliefs into action.<sup>31</sup>

In April 2001, a relative of Sheikh set forth a process where Sheikh would

eventually meet Asif Raza Khan.<sup>32</sup> Riyaz and Sheikh had known each other from their days as SIMI activists in Mumbai; however, they came together as partners in the Indian Mujahidin project through Asif Khan. After reportedly receiving training at an LT camp in Pakistan, Sheikh, on instruction from Amir Raza Khan, began to recruit cadre in Azamgarh, starting in late 2002. Key among them were Atif Amin, who was killed in an October 2008 shootout with New Delhi police, Arif Badar, and Mohammad Shahnawaz.

By 2005, after the gathering at Jolly Beach, the multiple Indian Mujahidin network components had fallen into place. Prosecution documentation filed in New Delhi suggests Atif Amin's Azamgarh cell was responsible

**“The jihadist networks in India remain extremely fluid and consist of small groups of individuals who are loosely allied together.”**

for providing manpower for the attacks. Sadiq Sheikh liaised between the Azamgarh cell and the Indian Mujahidin's Mumbai-based senior leadership. Iqbal Shahbandri raised operatives for a specialist computer-services cell. Riyaz Shahbandri and his cell sourced explosives and bomb components that were assembled into usable devices. Abdul Subhan Qureshi traveled nationwide, finding SIMI sympathizers to assist with cells.<sup>33</sup>

During this period, parallel jihadist groups led by figures who knew the Indian Mujahidin leadership from their time in SIMI proliferated as well. For

example, Rahil Sheikh formed cadre who attempted to stage an abortive attack on Gujarat in 2006—an operation the Maharashtra police claim involved assault rifles and grenades packed into computer cases and shipped across the Indian Ocean by the LT. Nevertheless, the leadership of each separate jihadist network appears to have maintained operational secrecy, despite their common political past.

Little is known about the precise state of play between the Indian Mujahidin and the Karachi Project, but it is clear that the Indian Mujahidin network itself is just part of a larger jihadist project across India.<sup>34</sup> The 2008 bombings in Bangalore, for example, were carried out by a jihadist cell that had supplied explosives to Riyaz, but had no knowledge of his operations.<sup>35</sup> In the Bangalore case, LT-linked SIMI operative Sarfaraz Nawaz funded a Kerala-based jihadist cell run by long-time Islamist activist Tandiyantavide Nasir that trained recruits to carry out bombings on a ginger plantation in the forests around Kodagu, in southern India. Nawaz, who had worked closely with Qureshi in SIMI, does not appear to have known of his role in the Indian Mujahidin.

The central point is that the jihadist networks in India remain extremely fluid and consist of small groups of individuals who are loosely allied together. In this sense, they bear little resemblance to the large, hierarchically-structured Pakistan-based jihadist groups such as the LT or Jaysh-i-Muhammad—although even in the Pakistani cases there appear to have been some recent splintering.

### Conclusion

Riyaz Shahbandri's story is evidence that substantial political problems are driving jihadist mobilization within India. It also makes clear, however, that the LT's infrastructure in Pakistan is critical to these networks' reach and lethality. Key leaders such as Riyaz Shahbandri and Sadiq Israr Sheikh trained in Pakistan. Indian investigations into the Indian Mujahidin's bombings have not reached

27 “Riyaz Ismail Shahbandri @ Riyaz Bhatkal,” Maharashtra Police Anti-Terrorism Squad, September 30, 2008.

28 Ibid.

29 For Sadiq's story, see Praveen Swami, “The Indian Mujahidin and Lashkar-i-Tayyiba's Transnational Networks,” *CTC Sentinel* 2:6 (2009). Also see “Final Form Report Under Section 173, Code of Criminal Procedure in the Court of Kaveri Baweja, Chief Metropolitan Magistrate,” New Delhi Police Special Cell, November 2010, pp. 47-49.

30 Biographical details are drawn from interviews conducted with relatives and friends of Sheikh in Mumbai in March 2010, as well as from “Final Form Report Under Section 173, Code of Criminal Procedure in the Court of Kaveri Baweja, Chief Metropolitan Magistrate,” New Delhi Police Special Cell, November 2010, pp. 47-49.

31 Personal interview, senior Mumbai police official, March 2010.

32 Material in this paragraph is drawn from “Final Form Report Under Section 173, Code of Criminal Procedure in the Court of Kaveri Baweja, Chief Metropolitan Magistrate,” New Delhi Police Special Cell, November 2010, pp. 47-49.

33 For more details on Qureshi's background, see Swami, “The Indian Mujahidin and Lashkar-i-Tayyiba's Transnational Networks.” For other source material, see “Final Form Report Under Section 173, Code of Criminal Procedure in the Court of Kaveri Baweja, Chief Metropolitan Magistrate,” New Delhi Police Special Cell, November 2010.

34 Roul.

35 For a discussion of this case, from which the material in this paragraph is drawn, see Praveen Swami, “To Bangalore with Hate,” *Hindu*, April 21, 2010.

closure because figures central to the network's functioning have sought safe haven in Pakistan.

Many in India's intelligence services fear that the recent bombings in Pune in February 2010, Bangalore in April 2010, as well as the abortive attack in Deloitte in Hyderabad in May 2010 herald the coming of a renewed wave of jihadist violence intended to undermine the country's economic progress and status in the run-up to the high-profile Commonwealth Games, which will be held in New Delhi in October 2010. Whether or not Riyaz Shahbandri's so-called Karachi Project is a new endeavor or simply a name for ongoing jihadist activity directed at India, the country clearly faces a growing problem from Indian Muslims who have become radicalized and are able to seek assistance from Pakistan-based militants.

*Praveen Swami is Associate Editor of the Hindu, one of India's largest English-language newspapers, and reports on terrorism and low intensity conflicts in India. His most recent book, India, Pakistan and the Secret Jihad: The Covert War in Jammu and Kashmir, 1947-2002, was published by Routledge in 2007. The book was written while he was a Jennings Randolph senior fellow at the United States Institute of Peace in Washington, D.C., in 2004-2005. His scholarly work includes a 1999 book, The Kargil War, chapters in several edited volumes, and papers in journals including The India Review and Faultlines. Mr. Swami has won several major awards for his work, including the Indian Express-Ramnath Goenka Print Journalist of the Year prize, 2006.*

## Salafi-Jihadi Activism in Gaza: Mapping the Threat

By Benedetta Berti

IN JUNE 2007, Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip. Since then, numerous reports have surfaced about Salafi-jihadi and al-Qa`ida activity in the Palestinian Territories. Despite these reports, there is relatively little information on the Palestinian Salafist community and its connection with Hamas and the international Salafi-jihadi movement. This article provides an overview of the characteristics of the Salafi-jihadi movement in Gaza, and it maps the existing groups that pursue this militant ideology in the Palestinian Territories.

The article finds that the Salafi-jihadi network in the Gaza Strip is largely a local phenomenon and it has thus far lacked concrete organizational and operational links with al-Qa`ida or other international jihadist groups. Nevertheless, the network admires al-Qa`ida's *modus operandi*, is ideologically aligned with al-Qa`ida, and in the past has attempted to strike foreign targets in Gaza.<sup>1</sup> These worrying factors demonstrate the importance of monitoring Salafi-jihadi activity in the Palestinian Territories.

### Defining the Salafi-Jihadi Movement: A General Framework

Salafism, an Islamist revivalist movement within Sunni Islam, is not an entirely new phenomenon in Gaza. Non-violent Salafist organizations, focused on social work and proselytism, first emerged in the early 1980s under the guidance of clerics such as Shaykh Salim Sharab. Many of these clerics studied in Saudi Arabia before returning home to the Palestinian Territories. The movement continued to grow during the 1990s, but never became a mainstream faction within the Palestinian political arena.<sup>2</sup> Hizb al-Tahrir (also known as

Hizb-ut-Tahrir) is an example of this non-violent Salafist trend, advocating the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in Palestine while politically opposing the Hamas government.<sup>3</sup>

Violent Salafist groups, on the other hand, only developed in the Palestinian Territories in the past few years. These groups are focused on armed jihad and are globally referred to as Salafi-jihadis—this marks their distinction with non-violent Salafist groups. They mushroomed in the months leading up to and following the 2005 Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, and their presence additionally increased in the midst of the internecine struggle between Hamas and Fatah before Hamas' eventual takeover of Gaza in 2007.<sup>4</sup> In conjunction with a process of fragmentation within Palestinian society, new Salafist-inspired groups were created both to challenge the internal distribution of power between Fatah and Hamas and to advocate for stronger links between the predominantly nationalist or statist Palestinian cause and the international jihadist network. These groups initially emerged in Gaza and gained strength because of the temporary situation of anarchy and the vacuum of power created by the struggle between Hamas and Fatah. They were, however, able to gain legitimacy due to the ongoing process of decaying secularism within Palestinian society and the rise of Islamist political forces—a trend that is tightly connected with a wider regional dynamic.<sup>5</sup> Despite this phenomenon, the rise of Salafi-jihadi groups has occurred predominantly in Gaza, as the Fatah-controlled West Bank has mostly managed to contain the rise of new Islamist groups while cracking down on more established actors such as Hamas.

3 Reuven Paz, "Salafi-Jihadi Responses to Hamas' Electoral Victory," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 4, November 1, 2006.

4 For some of the first reports, see Khaled Abu Toameh, "Al-Qaida-Linked Terrorists in Gaza," *Jerusalem Post*, February 6, 2005; "Al-Qa'idah Claims Attack on Palestinian Official," *al-Arabiya*, May 21, 2006; Khaled Abu Toameh, "Al-Qaida in Palestine Issues Death Threat Against Abbas. PA Foils Attempt To Kill Fatah Security Chief," *Jerusalem Post*, May 22, 2006.

5 Asher Susser, "The Rise of Hamas in Palestine and the Crisis of Secularism in the Arab World," *Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Brandeis University*, February 2010, pp. 1, 45-46.

1 See, for example, the July 2008 interview between Salafi-jihadi activist Abu Mustafa and *Der Spiegel*. On that occasion, Mustafa stated: "We have to fight—just like our brothers on Sept. 11... We feel just like al-Qaida and we think as they do." For the interview, see Ulrike Putz, "Compared to Us, Hamas is Islamism Lite," *Der Spiegel*, July 18, 2008.

2 Hasan Jabr, "Al-Ayyam Opens File on Salafi Groups in The Gaza Strip," *al-Ayyam*, May 17, 2007.

Since then, the number of Salafi-jihadi groups operating in Gaza has multiplied, generating a myriad of small organizations and operational cells whose main focus has been both attacking Israel as well as attempting to “Islamize” Palestinian society by force. Although these groups may share with Hamas an interest in conducting jihad against Israel and a focus on Islamizing Palestinian society, the differences between the new Salafi-jihadi factions and the more established Palestinian political actors could not be more pronounced.

First, the Salafi-jihadi groups do not define the “resistance” against Israel in nationalist terms—as compared with Fatah or Hamas—and they instead insist on the transnational dimension of the Palestinian jihad, making their rhetoric far closer to al-Qa`ida than to other Palestinian armed and political groups. Second, the Salafi-jihadi forces are determined to Islamize Palestinian society and to implement Shari`a law by employing all available means, including force; this approach radically differs from both Fatah’s secular agenda as well as from Hamas’ more gradual approach to the issue. Third, these groups are completely opposed to political participation in non-Shari`a based political systems (such as the Palestinian one)—another commonality between these groups’ worldview and the vision of international jihadist organizations such as al-Qa`ida. As a result, the Salafi-jihadi groups in Gaza are highly critical of Hamas’ decision to participate in the 2006 Palestinian elections, and since then they have opposed the Hamas government. More recently, these groups have become even more confrontational with respect to Hamas, albeit lacking the strength to militarily challenge the organization.

The Salafi-jihadi network in Gaza is predominantly composed of self-radicalized Palestinians as well as disenchanting Fatah and Hamas militants.<sup>6</sup> The network consists of

approximately 4,000-5,000 members,<sup>7</sup> although its alleged followers could be as many as 50,000 people.<sup>8</sup> Despite reports from the Palestinian Authority claiming the contrary, the movement appears to be overwhelmingly Palestinian. Nevertheless, in the past couple of years a few dozen foreign militants, some of them returnees from Iraq, are believed to have entered the Gaza Strip through Egypt to join the local jihadist movement.<sup>9</sup>

#### Mapping the Threat

##### *Jaysh al-Islam*

One of the first Salafi-jihadi groups to emerge in the Gaza Strip is the Army of Islam (Jaysh al-Islam), which gained international notoriety by participating, together with Hamas’ Qassam Brigades and the Salah al-Din Brigades, in the kidnapping of Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldier Gilad Shalit in June 2006.<sup>10</sup> In the wake of the kidnapping, the group, using an al-Qa`ida-affiliated online forum, introduced itself as a Palestinian jihadist organization waging a religious war on Israel.<sup>11</sup> A few weeks later, Jaysh al-Islam conducted another major operation by kidnapping Fox News journalist Steve Centanni and cameraman Olaf Wiig.<sup>12</sup>

Jaysh al-Islam, created by former Popular Resistance Committee member Mumtaz Dughmush and linked to the powerful Dughmush clan in Gaza, became increasingly hostile to Hamas in the months preceding Hamas’ takeover of the Strip in 2007. During this period, Jaysh al-Islam began to openly challenge Hamas’ authority, leading to armed clashes between the two organizations.<sup>13</sup> Motivated by a

mix of religious and clan politics, and with the intent of emphasizing its capacity to prevent Hamas from ruling Gaza, Jaysh al-Islam kidnapped BBC correspondent Alan Johnston and held him for more than four months until Hamas was finally able to ensure his

**“The Salafi-jihadi movement within Gaza has been growing since 2006, and it now constitutes a loose network of mostly Palestinian fighters who have adopted an international jihadist approach to the previously more statist Palestinian struggle.”**

release.<sup>14</sup> Although the kidnapping was likely organized to embarrass and challenge Hamas, the group revealed its international jihadist orientation by linking Johnston’s freedom with the release of an al-Qa`ida cleric held in the United Kingdom, Abu Qatada. This stressed the group’s ideological proximity with al-Qa`ida.<sup>15</sup>

In the aftermath of the “Johnston Affair,” Hamas cracked down on Jaysh al-Islam’s activities, significantly reducing the group’s size and importance. Yet Jaysh al-Islam continued to conduct internal attacks against “corrupt” businesses in Gaza (including international co-ed schools), and on several occasions targeted the local Christian community.<sup>16</sup> In February 2008, for example, the group claimed responsibility for attacking the YMCA building in Gaza

Hamas.”

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Donald Macintyre, “Tape Provides First Evidence That BBC Reporter Was Taken,” *Independent*, May 10, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> “Ruling Palestine I: Gaza Under Hamas,” pp. 25-27; “Unidentified Gunmen Attack American School in Bayt Lahiyah,” Ma’an News Agency, January 12, 2008; Joshua Mitnic, “Gaza Christians in Peril After Takeover By Hamas; Attacks Against Churches Trigger Concern,” *Washington Times*, June 27, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> “Ruling Palestine I: Gaza Under Hamas,” International Crisis Group, March 19, 2008, p. 25; Khaled Abu Toameh, “Jund Ansar Allah Group Was Armed by Fatah Operatives, Hamas Claims. Radicals Were Latest In Gaza To Seek Imposition Of Islamic Law,” *Jerusalem Post*, August 16, 2009; Kifah Zibun, “The Salafi Groups in Gaza Are Close to Al-Qa`idah, and Have Split from Factions

Including Hamas,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 16, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Williams, “Salafism: A New Threat to Hamas,” *New York Times*, October 29, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Spyer, “Al-Qaida-Style Islamism Comes to Gaza. Millions of Petrodollars are Flowing in Every Month to Fund Islamist Extremists,” *Jerusalem Post*, August 20, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Amos Harel, “Terrorists Who Fought U.S. in Iraq Make Way to Gaza,” *Haaretz*, August 11, 2009; “Ruling Palestine I: Gaza Under Hamas,” p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Slackman and Souad Mekhennet, “A New Group That Seems to Share Al Qaeda’s Agenda,” *New York Times*, July 8, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Zibun, “The Salafi Groups in Gaza Are Close to Al-Qa`idah, and Have Split from Factions Including



and temporarily abducting its guards.<sup>17</sup> While recurrently clashing with Hamas, the organization remains active, and in 2009 it was reportedly involved in training Egyptian jihadists of the “al-Zeitun cell,” an al-Qa`ida-inspired group that was planning to assassinate Shalom Cohen, the Israeli ambassador to Egypt.<sup>18</sup>

#### *Suyuf al-Haq*

A “veteran” Salafi-jihadi group in Gaza is Swords of Righteousness (Suyuf al-Haq). The group’s operations in Gaza date before Hamas’ takeover of the Strip in 2007. Suyuf al-Haq is primarily concentrated in the Beit Hanoun area of northern Gaza. It is supposedly led by former Hamas cleric Abu Suheib al-Maqdisi, who left Hamas to protest its decision to take part in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections.<sup>19</sup> Since 2006, Suyuf al-Haq has been mostly involved in internal attacks within Gaza, aimed at changing the mores of Palestinian society and at “implementing God’s shari’ah and...to eradicate all forms of corruption.”<sup>20</sup> For example, Suyuf al-Haq has been responsible for bombings against Gaza’s internet cafes and music shops, attacks at the al-Arabiya media facilities in Gaza, as well as for kidnappings and attacks against people involved in activities deemed as “immoral”—ranging from throwing sulfuric acid at a woman dressed “provocatively” to attacking a young man listening to music.<sup>21</sup> Moreover,

the group has repeatedly threatened the Gaza-based Christian community. In 2006, for example, it announced its intention to blow up local churches in response to the publication in Denmark of political cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>22</sup> Finally, Suyuf al-Haq has been involved in assassinating its political enemies and is charged with killing senior Palestinian intelligence officer Colonel Jed Tayya in 2007, who the organization accused of being a Mossad agent.<sup>23</sup>

#### *Jaysh al-Umma*

Another major jihadist organization is the Army of the Nation (Jaysh al-Umma), operational since June 2007 when it first took responsibility for firing three rockets from Gaza into southern Israel.<sup>24</sup> The organization, led by Abu Hafs al-Maqdisi,<sup>25</sup> has since focused mostly on firing rockets, detonating explosives, and firing shells at Israel,<sup>26</sup> while largely avoiding claiming responsibility for attacks against internal Palestinian targets.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, Jaysh al-Umma demonstrated its interest in international targets during its first press conference in January 2008, when it announced its intention to assassinate U.S. President George W. Bush during a forthcoming trip to the region.<sup>28</sup> This declaration stressed the

group’s ideological proximity with al-Qa`ida, a link confirmed by Abu Hafs during several public appearances.<sup>29</sup> On one occasion, he stated: “For us Al-Qa`idah, Fatah al-Islam, and all those who believe in the Salafist creed are the same,” while however ensuring that the group holds no operational contacts with the international jihadist network.<sup>30</sup> During a separate interview, Abu Hafs

**“The Salafi-jihadi groups in Gaza are highly critical of Hamas’ decision to participate in the 2006 Palestinian elections, and since then they have opposed the Hamas government.”**

also clarified the group’s oppositional stance with respect to Hamas, by stating: “We believe that Hamas does not implement the rule of God on earth, and does not implement or enforce any ruling of the Islamic Shariah.”<sup>31</sup>

While Hamas at first tolerated Jaysh al-Umma’s activities against Israel, it eventually changed its position and reacted to the increased activism and animosity by temporarily arresting Jaysh al-Umma’s leader, Abu Hafs.<sup>32</sup> Since then, the two groups have been reciprocally hostile, with Jaysh al-Umma defying Hamas’ calls to preserve a cease-fire with Israel,<sup>33</sup> and with Hamas periodically arresting the

17 “YMCA Library Building in Gaza City Blown Up: Another Incident in a Series of Attacks on Western and Christian Targets in the Gaza Strip by Groups Associated With the Global Jihad and Radical Islam. The Hamas Movement, Which Controls the Gaza Strip, Does Not Put an End to the Phenomenon. Attacks on Western Targets in the Gaza Strip: Burned Down School Buses Belonging to the American International School,” Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, February 28, 2008; “Unknown Assailants Blow up Christian Youth Organization Library in Gaza,” Ma’an News Agency, February 15, 2008; Khaled Abu Toameh, “Gunmen Destroy Gaza Strip’s YMCA Library, Kidnap Guards,” *Jerusalem Post*, February 17, 2008.

18 Yoram Cohen, Matthew Levitt and Becca Wasser, “Deterred but Determined: Salafi-Jihadi Groups in the Palestinian Arena,” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 2010.

19 “Ruling Palestine I: Gaza Under Hamas,” p. 25.

20 Jabr, “Al-Ayyam Opens File on Salafi Groups in the Gaza Strip.”

21 “Islamist Group Claims Attack on Gaza Al-Arabiya Office,” Ma’an News Agency, January 25, 2007; “Salafi

Group Threatens Internet Cafes in Gaza Strip,” *al-Ayyam*, September 2, 2006.

22 “Islamist Group Claims Attack on Gaza Al-Arabiya Office.”

23 Ali Waked, “Al-Qaeda Affiliate Burns Coffee Shop in Gaza Strip,” YNetNews, October 10, 2006.

24 “New Organization Dubbed ‘Army of the Nation’ Claims Firing 3 Rockets at Sederot,” Ramattan News Agency, June 9, 2007.

25 “Al-Ayyam Interviews One of its Leading Figures in the Gaza Strip: Is Jaysh Al-Ummah the Palestinian Version of Al-Qa`idah Organization?” *al-Ayyam*, January 12, 2008.

26 See, for example: “IDF Troops Kill Palestinian Youth in West Bank, Two New Militant Groups Emerge,” Ma’an News Agency, September 17, 2007; “The Jaysh al-Ummah [Army of the Nation] Brigades Claimed Responsibility for Firing a Qa`qa Rocket,” Ma’an News Agency, January 12, 2008; “Jaysh al-Ummah Claims Responsibility for Sniping Two Israeli Farmers East of Al-Qararah,” Ramattan News Agency, April 4, 2008.

27 “Al-Ayyam Interviews One of its Leading Figures in the Gaza Strip: Is Jaysh Al-Ummah the Palestinian Version of Al-Qa`idah Organization?”

28 “Palestinian Group Threatens to Kill US President – Details,” Ma’an News Agency, January 8, 2008.

29 Ibid.; “Al-Ayyam Interviews One of its Leading Figures in the Gaza Strip: Is Jaysh Al-Ummah the Palestinian Version of Al-Qa`idah Organization?”; “Al-Arabiya TV Airs Footage Of Al-Qa`idah-Affiliated Jaysh Al-Ummah In Gaza,” BBC Monitoring Middle East, September 3, 2008.

30 “Al-Ayyam Interviews One of its Leading Figures in the Gaza Strip: Is Jaysh Al-Ummah the Palestinian Version of Al-Qa`idah Organization?”

31 “Al-Arabiya TV Airs Footage Of Al-Qa`idah-Affiliated Jaysh Al-Ummah In Gaza.”

32 “Jaysh al-Ummah: We Seek Abu-Hafs’s Release Through Peaceful Negotiations with Hamas,” SAMA News Agency, September 9, 2008.

33 “News of the Terrorism and Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, November 11-28, 2008.



group's militants and leaders.<sup>34</sup> To date, however, there has not been a major open armed clash between the two organizations.

#### *Jund Ansar Allah*

Another group, the Army of Allah's Supporters (Jund Ansar Allah), emerged in Rafah at the end of 2008 and was founded by Syrian-born Abu Abdallah al-Muhajir (Abu Abdallah al-Suri).<sup>35</sup> The organization, whose size was originally estimated at approximately 500 men, operates mostly in the cities of Khan Yunis and Rafah in Gaza.<sup>36</sup> According to Israeli security officials, its composition includes former Hamas and Fatah members,<sup>37</sup> as well as a few Egyptians, Yemenis, Pakistanis, and Afghan militants.<sup>38</sup> The group's main operational focus has been striking Israel, and its actions include a failed attack against the Nahal Oz fuel terminal station and IDF soldiers based there.<sup>39</sup>

Jund Ansar Allah's activism has been substantially curbed since August 2009 when it violently clashed with Hamas, resulting in more than 22 casualties. On that occasion, one of the organization's leaders and imam of the Ibn Taymiyya Mosque in Rafah, `Abd al-Latif Musa, announced a rebellion against Hamas and the creation of an "Islamic Emirate" in Rafah.<sup>40</sup> This prompted Hamas to intervene militarily and to kill both Abd al-Latif Musa as well as the group's military leader, Abu Abdallah al-Suri.<sup>41</sup>

The group suffered a serious blow on that occasion, and since then it has maintained a relatively low profile, although it continues to recruit new members.<sup>42</sup> Recently, in October 2009 and March 2010, Jund Ansar Allah resurfaced and claimed responsibility for rocket attacks against Israel.<sup>43</sup>

#### *Jaljalat*

Finally, another important Salafi-jihadi network is the so-called Jaljalat (or Ansar al-Sunna), a loosely-structured group composed largely of former and current Hamas militants.<sup>44</sup> Its military cadre is estimated at around 700 fighters.<sup>45</sup> The group is led by Mahmud Talib, a former leader within Hamas' military wing, and it first became operational in 2006 in response to Hamas' "moderate" stance and its participation in the Palestinian elections.<sup>46</sup> Talib has declared Jaljalat's intention to officially pledge its allegiance to al-Qa'ida in the course of a future terrorist operation, and reiterated its current ideological proximity with Usama bin Ladin's group.<sup>47</sup> In the past, the group has targeted Israel, other Palestinians, as well as international targets.<sup>48</sup> For example, Jaljalat is held responsible for attempting to assassinate both former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair when

they visited Gaza.<sup>49</sup> Within Gaza, Jaljalat has attacked local internet cafes, and it has claimed responsibility both for the bombing of the house of Marwan Abu Ras, a Hamas member of the Palestinian Legislative Council,<sup>50</sup> as well as for the bombings against Hamas' security buildings in August 2009 following the group's crackdown on Salafists in Rafah.<sup>51</sup>

Recently, Hamas launched a massive operation to arrest Jaljalat leader Talib, who was previously arrested but escaped from custody in December 2009.<sup>52</sup> The operation ended with the imprisonment of Talib in March 2010, weakening—albeit not destroying—the group's operational capabilities.<sup>53</sup>

#### *Fatah al-Islam*

More controversial are reports related to the presence of Fatah al-Islam cells in Gaza. The group, active in Lebanon since 2006 and concentrated in the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp, gained notoriety in May 2007 when it engaged in a prolonged and bloody confrontation with the Lebanese Army, a fight that claimed more than 400 lives—resulting in one of the worst episodes of internal violence since the end of Lebanon's civil war.<sup>54</sup> As early as December 2007, sources within the Palestinian Authority affirmed that Fatah al-Islam militants had infiltrated Gaza, where they had allegedly been involved in the launching of rockets against southern Israel.<sup>55</sup> There have not been additional facts to substantiate these allegations,

34 "Gaza Armed Group Says Hamas Arrested Seven Fighters," Ma'an News Agency, May 26, 2009.

35 Fathi Sabbah, "Gaza, a 'Suitable Greenhouse' for the 'Takfiri Groups,'" *al-Hayat*, August 16, 2009.

36 Ibid.; Hassan Jabr, "Jund Ansar Allah: New Salafi Organization Appears in Southern Part of Gaza Strip," *al-Ayyam*, January 5, 2009.

37 Toameh, "Jund Ansar Allah Group Was Armed By Fatah Operatives, Hamas Claims. Radicals Were Latest In Gaza To Seek Imposition Of Islamic Law."

38 Zibun, "The Salafi Groups in Gaza Are Close to Al-Qa'idah, and Have Split from Factions Including Hamas." See also Cohen et al.

39 "Hamas Steps up its Struggle Against the Global Jihad-Affiliated Networks Trying to Challenge its Control of the Gaza Strip. Hamas Recently Used Extreme Force to Suppress Global Jihad Operatives, One of Whose Leaders Proclaimed the Establishment of an Islamic Emirate in the Ibn Taymiyyah Mosque in Rafah," Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, September 1, 2009.

40 "Rafah Clashes Between Hamas Police, Salafi Group," *al-Arabiya*, August 14, 2009.

41 "Mideast: Hamas Declares Salafi Group Leader Dead;

Rafah Calm," *al-Arabiya*, August 15, 2009.

42 Nidal al-Mughrabi, "Qaeda Ally In Gaza Defiant, Seeing New Recruits," Reuters, September 16, 2009.

43 "Gaza Salafi Groups Claim Firing Two 'Projectiles' At Israel Agency," Ma'an News Agency, October 2, 2009; Fares Akram and Isabel Kershner, "Friday Rocket From Gaza Kills Thai Worker In Israel; Attack By Jihadist Group Comes As E.U. Foreign Policy Chief Visits Region," *International Herald Tribune*, March 19, 2010.

44 Hasan Jabr, "'Jaljalat' is Waiting to Carry out a Big Operation in Order to Dedicate it to Bin-Ladin," *al-Ayyam*, July 11, 2009.

45 Jonathan Spyer, "Al-Qaida-Style Islamism Comes to Gaza," *Jerusalem Post*, April 19, 2009; Jonathan Spyer, "New Fundamentalist Movements on the Rise In Gaza. Salafi Groups Find Support Among Hamas Militants," *Jerusalem Post*, October 29, 2009.

46 Zibun, "The Salafi Groups in Gaza Are Close to Al-Qa'idah, and Have Split from Factions Including Hamas."

47 Ibid.

48 See "Hamas Steps up its Struggle Against the Global Jihad-Affiliated Networks Trying..."; "Ansar al-Sunnah Claims Responsibility for Shooting at Israeli Patrol Near Kissufim Post," Ramattan News Agency, August 28, 2009.

49 Zibun, "The Salafi Groups in Gaza Are Close to Al-Qa'idah, and Have Split from Factions Including Hamas."

50 Jabr, "'Jaljalat' is Waiting to Carry out a Big Operation in Order to Dedicate it to Bin-Ladin."

51 Kifah Zibun, "Salafi Jihadi Movement Leader and former leading member of Al-Qassam Brigades: We Will Take revenge on Hamas; Islamic Emirate Will Be Achieved," *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 25, 2009.

52 "Salafi Group: Leader Escapes Gaza Jail," Ma'an News Agency, December 25, 2009.

53 "Jihadist Groups in Gaza Declare Hamas to be Infidel. Their Loyalty is to Bin Ladin and Their Bombings Reached the Home of Haniyah," *al-Hayat*, March 3, 2010.

54 Tine Gade, *Fatah al-Islam in Lebanon: Between Global and Local Jihad* (Kjeller: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 2007), pp. 27-29.

55 Khaled Abu Toameh, "PA Claims Fatah al-Islam Militants at Work in Gaza, Blames Hamas," *Jerusalem Post*, December 26, 2007.

and the Hamas government has since denied any operational presence of the Lebanese Salafi-jihadi group in Gaza, accusing the Palestinian Authority of fabricating accusations to further destroy Hamas' international image.<sup>56</sup> Even if the Palestinian Authority's reports are accurate, Fatah al-Islam's presence in Gaza has insofar been negligible.

#### *Various Smaller Groups*

In addition to these more well-established groups, there are also a number of smaller, loosely affiliated cells that adopt a variety of front names to perpetrate their attacks.<sup>57</sup> This makes it more difficult to determine with certainty the group behind each operation. Accordingly, a number of important jihadist plots—including the attack at the UNRWA-sponsored festival in the al-Umariya school in Rafah in 2007—have been attributed to “al-Qa`ida affiliates” without being able to fully uncover which cell or group was behind them.<sup>58</sup> This data is still, however, highly significant, as it shows the ongoing proliferation of the Salafi-jihadi movement and the related rise in the number of active groups. As late as August 2009, new groups were in fact still emerging in Gaza, including al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, established with the progressive closure of Gaza,<sup>59</sup> and Kata'ib al-Tawhid, which claims a cadre of several hundred fighters and an expertise in “RPG rockets, kalashnikovs, explosive devices, and mines, but we are trained in everything, including martyrdom.”<sup>60</sup>

#### **Conclusion and Threat Assessment**

The Salafi-jihadi movement within Gaza has been growing since 2006, and it now constitutes a loose network of mostly Palestinian fighters who have adopted an international jihadist approach to the previously more statist Palestinian struggle. Although none of these groups seem to have concrete organizational or operational ties with al-Qa`ida, they all show ideological proximity with the international jihadist network, and they have demonstrated a strong interest in targeting international targets within Gaza. To date, these groups have lacked the sophistication and strength to conduct large-scale terrorist operations, either within Gaza or against Israel.

This situation may change, however, if the Salafi-jihadis succeed in transitioning from a loose cluster of groups into a more operationally, logistically, and strategically interconnected network. In other words, these organizations have a limited capacity to coordinate their operations, and their overall effectiveness is impaired by the proliferation of small jihadist cells, the rapid emergence of new militant groups, and the fluid nature of these organizations. The rise of Jaljalat as a loosely structured group represents an interesting phenomenon. It has the highest potential to expand and develop into an even broader umbrella organization and co-opt other smaller factions, thereby increasing its operational strength and effectiveness.

In analyzing the ongoing trends within the Salafi-jihadi camp in Gaza, it is also important to mention these groups' increasingly antagonistic relations with Hamas. In this sense, a clear watershed has been the August 2009 armed clashes between Hamas and the Salafi-jihadis in Rafah. Hamas shifted from an initial tolerance of Salafi-jihadi operations against Israel to implementing a strategy of containment based on attempting to control Gaza's religious institutions, detaining these groups' most radical members, and occasionally cracking down on the operational cells.<sup>61</sup>

In particular, Hamas has become more determined in regulating and controlling these groups in the aftermath of the January 2009 Gaza war, mostly as a

reaction to the Salafi-jihadis' repeated defiance of the Hamas government.<sup>62</sup>

In parallel, however, the jihadist factions have grown even more defiant of Hamas, both by continuing to disregard its calls to maintain a cease-fire and, more recently, by starting to directly target Hamas members and government figures.<sup>63</sup> This attitude has been effectively summarized by Kata'ib al-Tawhid's leader Abu Abdhallah, by stating that his group now aims “to overthrow Hamas and set up an Islamic caliphate in the Gaza Strip.”<sup>64</sup> Although the Salafi-jihadi movement lacks the military strength to implement this threat, its role in Gaza cannot be underestimated, especially considering the ongoing defection of disenchanted Hamas fighters who leave the group's military brigades to join the new, more radical jihadist formations.<sup>65</sup>

*Benedetta Berti is the Bradley Foundation Doctoral fellow at the Fletcher School (Tufts University), and a Neubauer Associate Research Fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies (Tel Aviv University). Ms. Berti specializes in international security studies and Middle Eastern politics.*

56 “Talk About Presence of Fatah al-Islam in Gaza Ridiculous Joke, Exposed Scandal for Those Who Support Embargo,” BBC Monitoring Middle East, January 6, 2008.

57 Walid Phares, “Jihadist Games in Gaza; Western Media Must Be Careful,” *Washington Times*, August 31, 2006.

58 Jabr, “Al-Ayyam Opens File on Salafi Groups in The Gaza Strip.” Also see, for example, “Jihadist Groups in Gaza declare Hamas to Be Infidel. Their Loyalty Is to Bin Ladin and Their Bombings Reached the Home of Haniyah.”

59 Kifah Zibun, “Abu-Hamzah Al-Maqdisi to Al-Sharq Al-Awsat: We Are Not Takfiris, and We Are Proceeding with the Establishment of an Islamic Emirate,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 5, 2009.

60 Roberto Bongiorno, “Palestinian Salafist Cell Leader Explains Anti-Hamas Objectives,” *Il Sole 24 Ore*, August 18, 2009.

61 Spyer, “Al-Qaida-Style Islamism Comes To Gaza.”

62 For example, by ignoring the group's calls to respect the unofficial cease-fire with Israel, or by openly challenging Hamas' monopoly of force within Gaza.

63 “Jihadist Groups in Gaza Declare Hamas to be Infidel. Their Loyalty is to Bin Ladin and Their Bombings Reached the Home of Haniyah.”

64 Bongiorno.

65 Ibid.

## The Virtual Jihad: An Increasingly Legitimate Form of Warfare

By Akil N. Awan

IN A LETTER TO Mullah Omar in 2002, Usama bin Ladin wrote, "It is obvious that the media war in this century is one of the strongest methods; in fact, its ratio may reach 90% of the total preparation for the battles."<sup>1</sup> Supporting this view, Ayman al-Zawahiri stated in 2005, "More than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. We are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our umma."<sup>2</sup> This staggering asymmetry attributed to the "media jihad" by al-Qa'ida's leadership should be understood in the context of a fervent desire to engage with and mobilize the Muslim masses, which in turn is predicated primarily on the fear of the existential threat posed by obsolescence. Indeed, the Muslim masses, on whose behalf al-Qa'ida claims to serve as a crucial vanguard, have remained largely immune to the cajoling messages of global jihad, with large swathes of the Muslim world having repudiated the message outright.<sup>3</sup> As al-Zawahiri lamented in 2001, "we should realize the extent of the gap in understanding between the jihad movement and the common people."<sup>4</sup> As a result, the jihadists' inordinate focus on the media jihad in the 21st century has arisen as the primary vehicle to avert the patent failure of jihadist ideology to date.

The internet quickly surpassed all other media forms in becoming the principle arena for this frenetic media activity, and by extension the primary platform for the dissemination and mediation of the culture and ideology of jihadism.<sup>5</sup> Until relatively recently, much of this "official" jihadist media activity had been hierarchically organized and strictly regulated.<sup>6</sup> Yet the advent of Web 2.0 platforms such as file-sharing portals, forums, social networking sites, and the blogosphere,<sup>7</sup> whose egalitarian and democratizing nature are conducive to the "leveling" of hierarchies of knowledge and power, have facilitated a far more diffuse dissemination of autonomous user-generated jihadist media content outside the "official" jihadist spaces.<sup>8</sup>

One of the underlying factors behind this seemingly exponential increase in autonomous user-generated jihadist media content has been the changing demographic of the jihadist movement itself. Jihadism today is generally understood to be a phenomenon associated with young males,<sup>9</sup> and consequently

many of the new generation of virtual media jihadists are "digital natives" rather than "digital immigrants."<sup>10</sup> Consequently, for many media jihadists, there is little "new" about the new media environment. Rather, it is the only media environment with which they are familiar. Much of their social and other interaction already takes place within this new media environment, and it is unsurprising that their political activism should similarly take place within this arena.<sup>11</sup>

This article explores the ascendancy of the virtual media jihad over the physical jihad, and the mechanisms through which it has become an increasingly credible and legitimate mode of conflict. In attempts to understand this paradigm shift and its consequences, the article also examines the cathartic functions of the virtual media jihad, and its impact on jihadist ideology and the movement more broadly.

### Sanctioning the Virtual Media Jihad

One of the previous perennial debates in jihadist circles had focused on the status of those who fail to physically engage in the "jihad." In the past, such individuals had been reproached for limiting their contribution to words or funds rather than deeds. With the increasing recognition by the jihadist leadership of the critical need for engaging in the "media battle," however, various jihadist ideologues have attempted to legitimize this activity, often by drawing upon historical or religious precedents. Abu al-Harith al-Ansari's categorization of the types of warfare sanctioned by the Prophet Muhammad, for example, cites "media warfare" as a legitimate endeavor, whereas Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Salim's highly popular text, "39 Ways to Serve and Participate in Jihad," extols "performing electronic jihad" as "a blessed field which contains

1 This document is located in the Harmony Database located at the Combating Terrorism Center at the U.S. Military Academy, West Point. The document ID is AFGP-2002-600321.

2 "Letter from al-Zawahiri to al-Zarqawi," GlobalSecurity.org, July 9, 2005. This document was released by the U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence in October 2005.

3 See, for example, "Islamic Extremism: Common Concern for Muslim and Western Publics," Pew Research Center, July 14, 2005; "Confidence in Obama Lifts U.S. Image Around the World," Pew Research Center, July 23, 2009.

4 Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner*, 2001, available online in English at [www.tawhed110mb.com/books/Knights\\_Under\\_the\\_Prophet\\_Banner\\_english.pdf](http://www.tawhed110mb.com/books/Knights_Under_the_Prophet_Banner_english.pdf).

5 The Global Islamic Media Front, a prominent media organ of al-Qa'ida, acknowledged in 2005 that it was now the only arena available to them: "half the battle of the mujahidin is being waged on the pages of the Internet – the sole outlet for mujahideen media." This was cited in Stephen Ulph, "Mujahideen to Pledge Allegiance on the Web," *Terrorism Focus* 2:22 (2005). Also see Akil N. Awan, "Virtual Jihadist Media: Function, Legitimacy, and Radicalising Efficacy," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10:3 (2007).

6 Indeed, specific actors (such as the Islamic State of Iraq), producers (such as al-Furqan), distributors (such as al-Fajr), and specific jihadist forum administrators control virtually every stage of the media production and dissemination process. See, for example, Akil N. Awan and M. al-Lami, "Al-Qaeda's Virtual Crisis," *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute* 154:1 (2009); Daniel Kimmage, "The Al-Qaeda Media Nexus: The Virtual Network Behind the Global Message," 2008.

7 Web 2.0 refers to a wide range of second generation services on the internet that has signaled a paradigm shift in which web users contribute as easily as they consume.

8 A roster of Arabic forums (*muntadayat*) have served as semi-official mouthpieces for the global jihadist movement over the years, including a number of forums sponsored by the al-Fajr Media Center (al-Qa'ida's media wing) such as al-Ikhlaas, al-Firdaws, and al-Buraq, as well as others such as al-Hesba, al-Faloja, Shumook al-Islam, and al-Ansar.

9 Jihadists (ignoring the leadership and ideologues) are generally found to be under the age of 25. See Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First*

*Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); and Akil N. Awan, "Antecedents of Islamic Political Radicalism among Muslim Communities in Europe," *Political Science & Politics* 41:1 (2008).

10 Marc Prensky, "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants," *On the Horizon* 9:5 (2001).

11 Whether it is social networking, shopping, dating, playing videogames, watching movies, reading news, listening to music, learning—in fact, any activity in the "real" world now has a virtual counterpart that may appear to be more appealing to a certain age cohort that represents this "digital native."



much benefit.”<sup>12</sup> This, he suggests, includes

following and spreading of news between the people, in addition to a chance to defend and stand up for the mujahidin and spread their ideas and their requests to the people. This effort can be divided into two major parts: discussion boards and hacking methods.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps the most infamous recent jihadist ideologue, Anwar al-`Awlaqi, suggests “fighting the lies of the Western media,” “following the news of jihad and spreading it,” and “spreading the writings of the mujahidin and their scholars.”<sup>14</sup> Yet perhaps al-`Awlaqi’s most interesting contribution is number 29 on the list: “WWJ Jihad.” According to al-`Awlaqi,

Some ways in which the brothers and sisters could be “internet mujahidin” is by contributing in one or more of the following ways: establishing discussion forums that offer a free, uncensored medium for posting information relating to jihad; establishing e-mail lists to share information with interested brothers and sisters; posting or e-mailing jihad literature and news; and establishing websites to cover specific areas of jihad, such as mujahidin news, Muslim prisoners of war, and jihad literature.<sup>15</sup>

The contemporary jihadist strategist and a key proponent of a decentralized, leaderless jihad, Abu Mus`ab al-Suri, even acknowledged the underlying reasons why this mode of action may be

appealing in his seminal *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*.<sup>16</sup> Al-Suri conceded the existence of large numbers of individuals within the jihadists’ ideological support base who are unwilling to engage in violence themselves. Addressing these individuals directly, al-Suri proposed a number of alternative modes of non-violent action to support the jihad, one of which entailed the “media or informational battle.”<sup>17</sup>

As a result of these varying legitimizing mechanisms, the “media jihad” has gradually gained respectability and has become a legitimate endeavor in itself. In some instances, it has even been held on par with “martyrdom” operations.<sup>18</sup>

#### The Catharsis of the Virtual/Media Jihad

The sanction provided to the “media jihad” has proven to be particularly important as it also helps assuage cognitive dissonance in the media jihadists themselves: the internal conflict arising from an inconsistency between the jihadist’s beliefs and actions. Thus, a jihadist who wishes to contribute to the conflict, but is unable or unwilling to partake in actual warfare (for any number of reasons, ranging from inaccessibility to the theaters of conflict, to indolence or cowardice) is given a vindictory rationale for this alternative, entirely legitimate mode of action. Media jihadists, for their part, have responded to these overtures with enthusiasm and unsurprisingly great relief—particularly in the knowledge that they are no longer relegated to their previous roles of voyeuristic passivity.

This cathartic function of the jihadists’ new media spaces, which allows aspiring jihadists to be part of the broader global

jihad but crucially without engaging in direct violence, cannot be overstated. Indeed, the virtual or media jihad has served an increasingly important function in subsuming diverse strains of political activism, unrest, and dissent, thereby providing a conduit and framework for its non-violent expression. Audiences can vent their anger and frustration at the various ills plaguing the Muslim world, or perhaps more importantly re-direct their energies in an ostensibly useful way without resorting to violent means.

There is little doubt that the media jihadists in these new roles have proven immensely useful to the growth of the movement and the dissemination of its ideology. One of the most celebrated virtual jihadists, Younis Tsouli (also known as Irhaabi 007, or Terrorist

**“The ‘media jihad’ has gradually gained respectability and has become a legitimate endeavor in itself. In some instances, it has even been held on par with ‘martyrdom’ operations.”**

007), whose contributions to the global jihad may have been confined to media production efforts from a bedroom computer in the United Kingdom, nevertheless received considerable acclaim from jihadists around the world, including from prominent individuals such as Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi in Iraq. The important role played by media jihadists is acknowledged candidly in Tsouli’s exchange with a fellow forum member, “Abuthaabit,” who attempted to convince a self-effacing Tsouli of his immense contributions to the jihad:

This media work, I am telling you, is very important. Very, very, very...Because a lot of the funds brothers are getting is because they are seeing stuff like this coming out. Imagine how many people have gone [to Iraq] after seeing the situation because of the videos. Imagine how many

12 Abu al-Harith al-Ansari, *Irshad al-Sa`ul ila Hurub al-Rasul*, 2008.

13 Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Salim, “39 Ways to Serve and Participate in Jihad,” 2003.

14 Anwar al-`Awlaqi has gained recent prominence due to his implication in the potential radicalization of the Ft. Hood shooter, Major Nidal Hasan; the Christmas Day bomber, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab; and the Times Square bomber, Faisal Shahzad. These quotes are drawn from his popular work, “44 Ways of Supporting Jihad.” Al-`Awlaqi’s work is in fact based upon al-Salim’s text, with large portions of the text having been plagiarized outright without any sort of acknowledgement or attribution.

15 Anwar al-`Awlaqi, “44 Ways of Supporting Jihad,” 2009.

16 Abu Mus`ab al-Suri is perhaps best known for this theory of decentralized “leaderless terrorism,” which he describes as *nizam la tanzim* (system, not organization).

17 Abu Mus`ab al-Suri, “Theory of Media and Incitement in the Call to Global Islamic Resistance,” in *The Global Islamic Resistance Call*, 2005.

18 For example, the prominent media jihadist Younis Tsouli (also known as Irhaabi007) is frequently lionized by fellow forum members for spreading jihadist videos and messages, which have been highly instrumental in the successful radicalization and indeed “martyrdom” of many others. The implicit suggestion of course is that although Tsouli has not “achieved martyrdom” himself, he has been of far greater benefit to the jihadist cause in enabling the martyrdom of many others in his stead. See “A World Wide Web of Terror,” *Economist*, July 13, 2007.

of them could have been *shahid* [martyrs] as well.<sup>19</sup>

Virtual media jihadists have also increasingly understood that immersion in the virtual conflict does not necessarily render them immune to repercussions in the real world, such as arrest and prosecution under charges of materially abetting terrorism, encouraging or glorifying terrorism, or disseminating terrorist publications.<sup>20</sup> The successful arrest and prosecution of a number of individuals in Europe on such charges have shown these to be genuine concerns that must be considered by media jihadists before engaging in any potentially incriminating activity.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, jihadists online have also long been cognizant of the threat posed by the presence of security agencies and civilian “spies” within the new media spaces of the jihad. Many jihadist forums dissuade individuals from communicating sensitive information over the internet and encourage users to employ methods for masking their identities online. For some, these elements of danger provide further justification that they are engaging in a legitimate aspect of the conflict, evident from the “enemy’s” usage of the very same spaces and from the personal hazards to which they are themselves exposed.

#### The Transition to the Real Jihad

Nevertheless, despite the considerable means employed to legitimize the media jihad, it would be imprudent to assume that the media jihad has the power to completely supplant the physical jihad,

which has curiously continued to prove irresistible to some. Despite garnering considerable acclaim in the virtual world, and being greeted on the forums as “The hero – God salutes you,” Tsouli nevertheless harbored yearnings for “martyrdom” on the “real” battlefield. Tsouli lamented to his fellow virtual jihadists, “Hero? I am only half a man now...my heart is in Iraq.”<sup>22</sup> In fact, Tsouli’s desire for “real” jihad appears to have led to his eventual demise; he was sentenced to 16 years imprisonment in 2007 for his involvement in a decentralized web of terrorist plots.<sup>23</sup>

There exist numerous other examples of successful transitions from the virtual world to engaging in physical jihad, and include the recent case of Abu Dujana al-Khurasani (the alias of Humam Khalil Abu Mulal al-Balawi), a well-known administrator of the al-Hesbah jihadist forum. Abu Dujana was at some point recruited by the Jordanian General Intelligence Directorate (GID), but who instead, serving as a double-agent, conducted a suicide attack against U.S. Camp Chapman near Khost in Afghanistan in December 2009, killing seven CIA operatives and a member of the GID. In interviews given by his wife after the event, al-Balawi is portrayed as someone “obsessed with jihad,” but whose considerable writings on jihadist forums left him feeling increasingly guilty over his self-induced inactivity.<sup>24</sup> His experiences clearly resonate strongly with many jihadists confined to the virtual or media arena, and perhaps al-Balawi’s eventual transformation may provide some form of vicarious validation for the media jihadists’ own current passivity. Certainly, al-Balawi’s actions have been widely hailed within the virtual jihadist community, with “Abu Dujana” quickly immortalized in videos, photo montages, and even poetry, including an almost farcical ode to al-Balawi entitled “Our James Bond.”

Others appear content to remain within the virtual media sphere, enjoying the catharsis afforded by virtual action, unless of course they are compelled to leave, which may lead to actual

physical violence and terrorism. The unprecedented attack on jihadist new media environments from September 2008 onward, which included the disruption of major jihadist web forums, severely curbed the opportunities for “media jihad.”<sup>25</sup> One forum member lamented,

with the closure of all our sites, you [the Crusaders and their agents] have left us with no choice but to physically join the caravan of jihad. With no jihadi sites through which we can support our brother mujahidin, there is no point for us to stay behind. We shall join them. Your act has shamed us and caused us to think ‘what is left for us?’<sup>26</sup>

Ironically, individuals who may not have countenanced actual violence in the past may in the absence of these virtual arenas feel compelled to relinquish their virtual personas in favor of real-life jihadist operations.<sup>27</sup>

#### Conclusion

The virtual or media jihad has not only gained prominence and credibility as a wholly legitimate alternative to traditional conceptions of jihad, but has also progressively outpaced the militaristic or physical jihad in the modern era. While the “real” jihad continues to hold a certain level of aspirational appeal, the catharsis offered by the media or virtual jihad has proven sufficiently able to supplant traditional notions of jihad for a new generation of activists, unwilling or unable to engage in actual violence themselves. Consequently, while the occasional transitions from virtual to real actions will remain a distinct and disconcerting possibility, they are unlikely to be adopted as praiseworthy precedents by significant numbers of virtual jihadists, despite whatever rhetorical validation they might be accorded publicly. Moreover, the uncertain dynamics of these processes, typically articulated as “radicalization online” or “virtual radicalization,” remain uncertain and

19 Quoted in “A World Wide Web of Terror.”

20 As proscribed at least in the United Kingdom by the UK Terrorism Act 2006, Part 1, available at [www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/pdf/ukpga\\_20060011\\_en.pdf](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/pdf/ukpga_20060011_en.pdf).

21 The case of Babar Ahmad provides one of the earliest examples of the serious dangers inherent in conducting “media jihad.” A British information technology support specialist, Babar Ahmad was arrested under the UK Terrorism Act 2000 in 2003 in connection with running the “mujahideen news” website [azzam.com](http://azzam.com). He was beaten in police custody before being released without charge, but then re-arrested shortly thereafter following a U.S. extradition request on charges of “providing material support to terrorists and conspiring to kill persons in a foreign country.” Babar Ahmad has now been held for almost six years without trial or charge by British authorities whilst awaiting his pending extradition. For details, see Richard Ford, “Babar Ahmad Awarded £60,000 Damages for Assaults by Police,” *Times*, March 19, 2009.

22 Nadya Labi, “Jihad 2.0,” *Atlantic Monthly* 297:6 (2006).

23 “Three Jailed for Inciting Terror,” BBC, July 5, 2007.

24 Adem Demir and Christopher Dickey, “The Bomber’s Wife,” *Newsweek*, July 1, 2010.

25 See Awan and al-Lami for a detailed overview of this concerted assault on jihadist virtual media environments.

26 This statement was posted on [www.shamikh1.net/vb/](http://www.shamikh1.net/vb/).

27 Awan and al-Lami.

contested, particularly as the linkage between words and acts online and deeds offline is exceedingly problematic.<sup>28</sup>

The nexus between Web 2.0 in particular and the media or virtual jihadist has undoubtedly had important repercussions for jihadism in the 21st century, rejuvenating its ailing ideology and facilitating the dissemination of its counterculture to new audiences, many of whom are beyond the traditional scope of official jihadist media organs. Although the jihadist message is increasingly being granted more diffuse audience penetration, the ideology itself has been forced to sacrifice a significant degree of its coherency and cogency along the way. Marshall McLuhan's well-known and prescient maxim, "the medium is the message," can perhaps help explain how the promotion of a virtual or media jihad within this new media environment has fundamentally recast the ideology of jihadism in the new century to retain its relevance to a new generation of "digital natives."<sup>29</sup>

*Dr. Akil N. Awan is the current RCUK Fellow in the "Contemporary History of Faith, Power and Terror," and Lecturer in both International Terrorism and Contemporary Islam in the Department of History and the Department of Politics and International Relations at Royal Holloway, University of London. His research interests are focused around processes of radicalization, global jihadism, the new media (particularly Web 2.0), and the history of terrorism. He is currently working on his monograph entitled, "Trajectories of Radicalization: Explaining the Rise of Homegrown Terrorism," to be released next year. His new book on Media and Radicalization: Political Violence in the New Media Ecology (co-authored with A. Hoskins and B. O'Loughlin) will be released later this year by Routledge.*

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Akil N. Awan, "Radicalization on the Internet? The Virtual Propagation of Jihadist Media and its Effects," *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute* 152:3 (2007); Tim Stevens and Peter R. Neumann, *Countering Online Radicalisation: A Strategy for Action* (London: ICSR, 2008); Anthony Begin, Sulastri Bte Osman, Carl Ungerer and Nur Azlin Mohamed Yasin, *Countering Internet Radicalisation in Southeast Asia*, RSIS-ASPI, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (London: Routledge, 1964).

## Internet Jihadists React to the Deaths of Al-Qa`ida's Leaders in Iraq

By Abdul Hameed Bakier

ON APRIL 18, 2010, U.S. and Iraqi forces killed al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI) chief Abu Ayyub al-Masri (also known as Abu Hamza al-Muhajir) and Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) leader Abu `Umar al-Baghdadi.<sup>1</sup> The deaths marked another blow to AQI, which also lost its previous leader, Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi, to a U.S. airstrike in June 2006. U.S. General Ray Odierno, the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, said that the killings were "potentially the most significant blow to al-Qaeda in Iraq since the beginning of the insurgency."<sup>2</sup>

In addition to damaging the organizational capabilities of AQI, the deaths caused an immediate reaction on jihadist internet forums. Jihadist sympathizers and other forum users at first refused to believe Iraqi government claims that the two leaders were killed, especially since there had been numerous false reports of their deaths in the past. Yet when the ISI announced the martyrdom of the two men, it became clear that U.S. and Iraqi forces had succeeded in decapitating the leadership of AQI and the ISI.

This article focuses on the online reaction to the deaths of Abu Ayyub al-Masri and Abu `Umar al-Baghdadi, examining the initial reactions of online jihadist forum users, statements on the deaths from other jihadist groups, and how jihadist forum users viewed the future of the Iraqi jihad in the wake of the recent setbacks.

### Online Jihadist Reaction to the Deaths

In response to the Iraqi government's initial announcement on the deaths of al-Masri and al-Baghdadi, online jihadists expressed disbelief. Members on various jihadist internet forums claimed that Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's statement was government

propaganda against al-Qa`ida, similar to past statements erroneously announcing the arrest of al-Baghdadi.

This response changed, however, after the ISI's Ministry of Religious Affairs admitted that both al-Baghdadi and al-Masri had in fact been killed. The ISI assured the Islamic world that it remained in good hands and had already appointed new leadership. The statement, signed by Abu al-Waleed Abdul Hadi al-Mashhadani, reportedly said, "If Allah fated that the two sheikhs be killed at this particular time, know that they left a unique generation behind, one that was raised before their eyes."<sup>3</sup> The ISI also released a separate statement that read,

Here we accept congratulations for the martyrdom of the war lions...Amirs of Jihad. They paid their dues and raised our heads high...they put the U.S. and its collaborators in the dirt. We will continue on the same path. No backing down now. Don't turn away. Be as quiet as death and solid as steel. The world is digging its own grave.<sup>4</sup>

After it became clear that U.S. and Iraqi authorities succeeded in killing the heads of AQI and the ISI, jihadist forum contributors called for revenge. One forum member challenged "the infidels," warning that jihad would never stop. The user reminded readers of how even the death of Abu Mus`ab al-Zarqawi in 2006 did not quell AQI's activities in Iraq. "Will jihad retract?" he asked.

Previously, when al-Zarqawi was killed, some thought jihad would cease in Iraq. At the time of al-Zarqawi's death, the Iraqi political situation was somewhat stable, but jihad continued. Presently, Iraq is in a political vacuum, rendering better chances for the mujahidin to carry out attacks.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "U.S.: 2 of Al Qaeda's Top Leaders Killed in Iraq," CBS News, April 19, 2010; "Qaeda in Iraq 'Names Replacements for Slain Leaders,'" Agence France-Presse, May 16, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> "Al-Qaeda in Iraq Says Leaders Dead," al-Jazeera, April 25, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. This statement was posted on [www.alboraq.info](http://www.alboraq.info) on April 25, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> This statement was posted on [www.muslim.net](http://www.muslim.net) on April 25, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> This statement was posted on [www.alboraq.info](http://www.alboraq.info) on April 29, 2010.



On a separate forum, another user called for revenge, warning that the United States “will not dream of or live in safety until we [the Islamic community] live it in Palestine and in all of the Islamic countries from Andalusia to China.”

Yet on one jihadist forum, a long exchange between users revolved around questions of tradecraft. “How could the security forces know the whereabouts of the most important leaders of the Islamic State of Iraq?” asked one user. A number of users in this exchange demanded to know who called the meeting between al-Masri and al-Baghdadi, as that person was likely a traitor to the Islamic cause and was working for the U.S. and Iraqi governments.

Other frustrated forum contributors felt that al-Qa`ida’s media wings have been lying to its adherents concerning the success of the campaign in Iraq. These users argued that the deaths of al-Baghdadi and al-Masri reveal that al-Qa`ida is weak and that its cells are not connected through proper communications networks. They argued that al-Qa`ida’s propaganda and lies were aimed at luring more recruits. “If the news is true, it means one thing,” was the refrain among users in this camp.

Al-Qa`ida’s media wing is lying and spreading false information on the Iraqi arena. It’s holding back the fact that al-Qa`ida is weak and its members are living in an incinerator with no communication means with other cells. The depletion of al-Qa`ida is imminent. Everybody is tired of al-Qa`ida’s stupidity.<sup>6</sup>

Another jihadist user, Marzook, who is known as being against the ISI, said, “The death of the ISI’s top two men in one hole shows the bankruptcy of the organization and the contraction of the Iraqi arena.”

#### Reaction from Jihadist Groups on the Deaths

Various Sunni jihadist groups released statements concerning the deaths of al-Masri and al-Baghdadi. On April 28, 2010, a statement from Ansar al-Islam appeared on jihadist web forums

offering condolences to “the brothers” in the ISI and to the Islamic world. The statement said that al-Masri and al-Baghdadi were “competent jihadists and fighters. They abandoned their world, not their religion.” Labayk Media, an outlet of the Taliban and al-Qa`ida, issued a statement on April 25 stating, “Today we say farewell to two jihadist figures...who fought the enemy.”<sup>7</sup> The statement assured that “the war has ups and downs and has not yet ended...God is our supporter...Our fallen ones are in heaven, while theirs are in hell.”<sup>8</sup>

Another jihadist group that offered condolences was Jaysh al-Umma, which is based in the Palestinian Territories. The Salafi-jihadi group released a statement expressing “condolences and even congratulations” over the martyrdom of al-Baghdadi and al-Masri.<sup>9</sup> The message warned that anyone who thinks “jihad would stop” with the death of a courageous leader is “wrong.”<sup>10</sup>

Various other Sunni jihadist groups across Iraq and elsewhere echoed these statements. Members of one Sunni jihadist group in Iraq, the al-Siddiq Army, apparently decided to join the ISI out of tribal allegiance.<sup>11</sup> Many jihadist forum participants believe that more jihadists in Iraq who belong to other groups will join the ISI in solidarity in the wake of the leadership decapitation.

#### Outlook for the Future

The majority of jihadist forum users were quick to assure that AQI, yet not necessarily the ISI, would remain strong in the wake of the latest setbacks. Some of these users, who claimed direct connection to the physical battlefield, wrote that the new AQI leadership is more experienced and will take advantage of the current political vacuum in the country. They believe that AQI and the ISI can be strengthened by exploiting the rivalries between Iraq’s many political groups.

Users also hoped that the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan would support al-Qa`ida in avenging the recent assassinations in Iraq. On April 27, 2010, for example, the al-Qa`ida-affiliated al-Shabab insurgent group in Somalia attacked an army base in Mogadishu with an explosives-laden truck. A spokesman for al-Shabab, Ali Mahmud Raji, said after the attack,

This operation was carried out to avenge the blood of our two heroic martyrs, God willing, Shaykh Abu `Umar al-Baghdadi, his minister the lion Abu Hamza al-Muhajir and the blood of everyone else that was with them when the cowards struck them.<sup>12</sup>

The statement included a picture of one of the purported suicide bombers, holding a flyer that read, “In revenge of the Emir of the Islamic State of Iraq and his war minister Abu Hamzeh al-Muhajir.”<sup>13</sup>

More significant, on May 1, 2010, Pakistani-American Faisal Shahzad allegedly attempted to detonate a car bomb in New York City’s Times Square. Shortly after the failed attack, a Pakistani Taliban statement appeared on jihadist web forums claiming responsibility for the attack as revenge for the deaths of al-Baghdadi and al-Masri in Iraq.<sup>14</sup> Despite the claim of responsibility, however, the extent of outside involvement in Shahzad’s attempted terrorist attack is not yet clear, as other Pakistani Taliban factions rejected involvement in the plot, and investigations are not yet complete on whether Shahzad acted alone. Moreover, based on various journalist investigations into his past, Shahzad himself had reportedly become radicalized long before AQI’s latest setbacks in Iraq, sending out angry e-mails to friends about U.S. foreign policy after the 9/11 attacks.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> This statement was posted on [www.alfaloyal.info](http://www.alfaloyal.info) on April 29, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. The picture was posted at [www.shamikh1.net/vb/](http://www.shamikh1.net/vb/).

<sup>14</sup> “Times Square Car Bomb: Pakistani Taliban ‘Claims Responsibility,’” *Telegraph*, May 2, 2010; James Gordon Meek, “Pak-Taliban: Times Sq. Bomb Avenged Qaeda-Iraq Leaders’ Deaths,” *New York Daily News*, May 2, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Andrea Elliott, Sabrina Tavernise and Anne Barnard, “For Times Sq. Suspect, Long Roots of Discontent,” *New York Times*, May 15, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> This statement was posted on [www.muslm.net](http://www.muslm.net) on April 21, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> This statement was posted on [www.alfaloyal.info](http://www.alfaloyal.info) on April 28, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> The statement appeared on a jihadist web forum and was dated April 25, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> This statement was posted on [www.muslm.net](http://www.muslm.net) on April 26, 2010.

### Conclusion

On May 15, 2010, the ISI purportedly announced that it has appointed new leaders to replace those lost in the U.S.-Iraqi operation that killed al-Baghdadi and al-Masri.<sup>16</sup> According to the statement, the new leaders are “Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Husseini al-Qurashi, the Emir of the Believers of the Islamic State of Iraq” and “Sheikh Abu Abdullah al-Hassani al-Qurashi is his prime minister and deputy.”<sup>17</sup> The ISI had already announced a new minister of war, Abu Suleiman, who will replace Abu Ayyub al-Masri, who served that role in addition to being the head of AQI. Abu Suleiman vowed revenge for the killings of al-Masri and al-Baghdadi, warning of “a long gloomy night and dark days colored in blood” and urging followers not to “become accustomed to having a loose hand on the trigger.”<sup>18</sup>

Leadership decapitations clearly have an effect on terrorist and militant groups. Whether or not the latest killings will put an end to AQI and the ISI remains an open question. Devastating bombings continue to rip through Iraq, with militants feeding off tensions between the country’s myriad political groups and factions. On May 10, for example, bombings, assassinations and ambushes tore through the country, killing at least 119 people and underscoring the pervasive threat.<sup>19</sup> It is clear from jihadist web forums that many remain hopeful about the insurgency in Iraq despite the recent setbacks. Whether those hopes will be borne out on the ground remains to be seen.

*Abdul Hameed Bakier is the former head of crisis management and terrorist negotiations in Jordan’s Counter-Terrorism Unit of the General Intelligence Department. At the GID, he also worked on international counterterrorism issues. Currently, he is active in monitoring jihadist internet traffic for counterterrorism analysis groups.*

## The Kidnapping and Execution of Khalid Khwaja in Pakistan

By Rahimullah Yusufzai

ON MARCH 26, 2010, two well-known former officials in Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and a British journalist went missing in North Waziristan Agency in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Before heading out to the tribal areas, the men told acquaintances that the purpose of the trip was to make a documentary on the Taliban and U.S. drone strikes.<sup>1</sup> The men, however, were abducted by a previously unknown militant group, the Asian Tigers. The group announced that it was holding hostage Khalid Khwaja, retired Colonel Sultan Amir Tarar (commonly referred to as Colonel Imam), and journalist Asad Qureshi. In exchange for the men’s release, the Asian Tigers demanded that Pakistan’s authorities release from custody three important Afghan Taliban leaders: Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, Maulawi Kabir and Mansour Dadullah.<sup>2</sup>

After the 10-day demand deadline expired, the Asian Tigers executed the elderly Khwaja and dumped his body on the roadside near Mir Ali in North Waziristan.<sup>3</sup> It repeated its earlier demand, but also ordered the freedom of 120 militants held by Pakistan. Moreover, the group insisted on \$10 million ransom for the release of Qureshi.<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, Asian Tigers spokesman Mohammad Omar made it clear that Colonel Imam and Qureshi would not be freed until 160 of their men, all militants, were released by Pakistan’s authorities.<sup>5</sup>

1 This information is based on a personal interview with Khalid Khwaja. Also see Rahimullah Yusufzai, “The Kidnapped,” *The News International*, April 27, 2010.

2 Iqbal Khattak, “Jehadi Channels’ Opened to Secure Release of Former ISI Spies,” *Daily Times*, April 23, 2010. There is no concrete evidence, however, that Kabir, the former Taliban governor for Nangarhar and Logar provinces and now military commander for eastern Afghanistan, is in Pakistani custody.

3 “Ex-ISI Official Khalid Khwaja Found Dead in FATA,” *Dawn*, April 30, 2010.

4 Mushtaq Yusufzai, “No Real Effort by Govt, Tribal Elders to Secure Release of Col Imam, Qureshi,” *The News International*, May 15, 2010.

5 This demand was addressed directly to this author over the phone on May 14, 2010.

This article provides information on the Asian Tigers, and explains the significance of the kidnapping and execution of Khalid Khwaja. Khwaja, for example, reportedly once maintained contacts with Usama bin Ladin and served as a facilitator between the Pakistani government and various jihadist groups. His surprising assassination reveals the changing composition of the overall Taliban network as a younger and less manageable generation of militants begins to take control.

### The Asian Tigers and the Grievances against Khalid Khwaja

Before the recent kidnappings, the Asian Tigers were an unknown group. It is widely believed to be a front organization for a faction of Pakistani militants who previously belonged to the anti-Shi’a militant group, Lashkar-i-Jhangvi. Other reports suggest that the Asians Tigers are a faction of the Punjabi Taliban and are composed of a small group of 30-40 Punjabi and Mehsud tribal militants expelled by their parent organizations, Lashkar-i-Jhangvi and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).<sup>6</sup>

Preliminary information on the group can be drawn from interactions with its spokesman, Mohammad Omar. Omar speaks Urdu, unlike the TTP’s Pashtu-language spokesmen and commanders, suggesting that he is from a group of Punjabi Taliban that has shifted operations from Pakistan’s Punjab Province to North Waziristan.<sup>7</sup> This group could be operating out of the Mir Ali area under the protection of local tribal militants.

Based on Khwaja’s brutal execution, the Asian Tigers clearly targeted him specifically. Some analysts believe that the group’s motive relates to Khwaja’s past actions, when he reportedly demanded that TTP leaders Hakimullah Mehsud and Waliur Rahman “get rid” of 14 senior Pakistani Taliban commanders—mostly Punjabis associated with Lashkar-i-Jhangvi—for allegedly being on the payroll of India’s

6 Mushtaq Yusufzai, “Asian Tigers’ Kill Khalid Khwaja on Expiry of Deadline,” *The News International*, May 1, 2010.

7 This observation was noted during the author’s telephone conversation with Mohammad Omar.

16 “Qaeda in Iraq ‘Names Replacements for Slain Leaders,’”

17 Ibid.

18 Anthony Shadid, “Iraqi Insurgent Group Names New Leaders,” *New York Times*, May 16, 2010.

19 “Iraq Boosts Security after 119 Killed in Attacks,” CBS News, May 11, 2010.

intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW).<sup>8</sup> If these reports are true, Hakimullah Mehsud must have been uneasy over the list since it contained the name of his cousin, Qari Hussain Mehsud.<sup>9</sup> Qari Hussain is a top Pakistani Taliban leader known as the master trainer of suicide bombers.<sup>10</sup> Others on the list included Qari Zafar, who is thought to be close to the senior TTP leadership.<sup>11</sup> Qari Zafar was wanted for planning the March 2006 attack on the U.S. Consulate in Karachi, which killed U.S. diplomat David Foy. He was reportedly killed, however, in a U.S. drone strike earlier this year.<sup>12</sup>

The Asian Tigers had other grievances against Khwaja. They accused him of betraying the *Lal Masjid* (Red Mosque) clerics during their showdown with Pakistani security forces in the heart of Islamabad in 2007. The Asian Tigers claimed that Khwaja lured Maulana Abdul Aziz out of the mosque only to have him arrested. This allegation, however, was refuted by Abdul Aziz himself, and he led the funeral prayers for Khwaja after his body was returned to Islamabad for burial.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, the Asian Tigers' spokesman denounced Khwaja as an agent of the ISI and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. The Asian Tigers charged that Khwaja opposed the Pakistani Taliban since he had called them "terrorists." The Asian Tigers also alleged that Khwaja and Col. Imam were visiting North Waziristan on the advice of former Pakistan Army Chief General Mirza Aslam Beg, retired ISI Lieutenant General Hamid Gul and serving ISI official Colonel Sajjad.<sup>14</sup>

Before executing Khwaja, the Asian Tigers forced him to make a number of statements on video. In the video,

Khwaja, under duress, admitted to being an ISI and CIA agent, and accepted guilt for the arrest of *Lal Masjid* cleric Maulana Abdul Aziz. Khwaja also said that certain jihadist commanders—such as Fazlur Rahman Khalil, Masood Azhar and Abdullah Shah Mazhar, along with militant organizations such as Jaysh-i-Muhammad, Harkat-ul-Mujahidin, Lashkar-i-Tayyiba, Jamiatul Mujahidin and al-Badr—were still operating as proxies for the ISI.<sup>15</sup>

These statements demonstrate the various divisions between jihadist groups in Pakistan. By having Khwaja "confess" to links with the ISI and CIA, the Asian Tigers not only wanted to justify his execution, but also to discredit opposing jihadist groups by associating them with the ISI. This move also allowed the Asian Tigers to show its independence from Pakistan's government, portraying themselves as more legitimate jihadists.

#### State of Affairs in North Waziristan

The kidnapping and subsequent execution of Khwaja highlights the complexities of the situation in North Waziristan. The Punjabi Taliban and other militant groups are able to operate in the tribal agency with the help of local tribal militants. These fighters are reportedly concentrated in the Mir Ali area, where Mehsud Taliban from South Waziristan have found refuge with tribal militants from the Daur tribe. There have also been reports about the presence of Uzbek militants from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, along with other foreigners including Arabs linked with al-Qa`ida, in the Mir Ali area. The Afghan Taliban's Haqqani network also maintains a presence in North Waziristan.

Much of the recent movement of fighters into North Waziristan came as a result of Pakistan's ongoing military offensive in South Waziristan. As Pakistan poured troops into that agency, many fighters simply moved north into the adjacent tribal agencies. Pakistan has been reluctant to undertake military activity in North Waziristan out of concern over uniting all the militant

and tribal groups in the region against it. Pakistan's government, for example, made a peace deal with North Waziristan militants led by Hafiz Gul Bahadur before it moved against the TTP in South Waziristan. Pakistan's security forces also do not want to open too many fronts at one time out of concern of

**"By having Khwaja 'confess' to links with the ISI and CIA, the Asian Tigers not only wanted to justify his execution, but also to discredit opposing jihadist groups by associating them with the ISI."**

stretching the military's resources and exposing its supply lines. Nevertheless, at some point the military will have to undertake a military operation in North Waziristan to deny further sanctuary for the tribal area's militants.

The militants' movement into North Waziristan, however, has not been without conflict. There are reports that Hafiz Gul Bahadur is angry over the provocative actions of Punjabi Taliban groups—such as the Asian Tigers—and the Mehsud Taliban.<sup>16</sup> Their confrontational actions only increase the odds that Pakistan's military will spread its offensive to North Waziristan, drawing Bahadur's forces into the fight. Moreover, militant forces in North Waziristan are always subject to possible attack by U.S. drone aircraft.

#### Conclusion

The fate of the two hostages still hangs in the balance. Pakistan's government is unlikely to release all of the militants demanded by the Asian Tigers, as many are dangerous or have already been convicted in the court system. The government may agree to release some, but not necessarily enough to satisfy the kidnappers.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 "Pakistani Taliban Confirm Death of Qari Zafar," *Dawn*, March 2, 2010.

13 Kashif Abbasi, "LJ Killed My Father: Usama Khalid," *The Nation*, May 1, 2010. Also see "Khalid Khwaja Laid to Rest in Islamabad," *Daily Express*, May 2, 2010.

14 "Confessions of a Spy," *Daily Times Monitor*, April 24, 2010; Nadir Hassan, "Who Killed Ex-ISI Official?" *Express Tribune*, April 30, 2010.

15 Hamid Mir, "What Was the Last Mission of Khalid Khwaja?" *The News International*, May 2, 2010; "Confessions of a Spy."

16 Malik Mumtaz Khan, "NWA Taliban Vow to Adhere to Peace Accord," *The News International*, May 15, 2010.



A number of conclusions can be drawn from this incident. The kidnappings and Khwaja's subsequent execution show the generational change among militants in Pakistan and the evolving relationship between the ISI and Taliban fighters. Khwaja, for example, was a controversial figure due to his associations with the ISI and links with certain militant groups. After he retired from the military, he worked as a lawyer and defended suspected militants and Islamist politicians.<sup>17</sup> He even reportedly once maintained contacts with Usama bin Ladin. It appears that the Asian Tigers killed him as revenge against the ISI and against the jihadist groups it believes are still working for the spy agency.

The new generation of militants in Pakistan is more independent and is pursuing more radical goals. Moreover, these domestic militant groups share links with transnational terrorist networks such as al-Qa`ida, and they are angry with Pakistan's government for aligning with the United States and NATO in the "war on terrorism." It appears that they want to embarrass Pakistan's government and force it to accept their demands. Future kidnapping attempts of high-profile security officials and other more aggressive tactics are likely as the Pakistani Taliban grow more diffuse and increasingly unpredictable.

*Rabimullah Yusufzai is a senior Pakistani journalist and political and security analyst presently working as Resident Editor of the English daily The News International in Peshawar. He is also an analyst for the leading Pakistani Urdu TV channel, Geo. He has been reporting on Afghanistan and Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and Baluchistan since the early 1980s.*

## The Sources of the Abu Sayyaf's Resilience in the Southern Philippines

By Rommel C. Banlaoi

SINCE THE LAUNCHING of the global war on terrorism in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, the Philippines has been engaged in a prolonged military campaign against the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). Key ASG leaders have been killed in this battle, while others have been imprisoned for various crimes associated with terrorism. Despite these successes, authorities have not been able to eliminate the ASG completely, and the group remains a threat to Philippine internal security. Even after losing key field commanders, the ASG is still able to replenish its membership primarily from affected and influenced villages in Sulu, Basilan and Tawi-Tawi (BASULTA) in the southern Philippines.

After providing a brief background of the ASG, this article examines the sources of the ASG's resilience in the face of government and international pressure. It argues that the ASG is a product of complex tensions in the southern Philippines, where criminal, political and militant groups at times collaborate to achieve shared goals. It also shows the limits of countering terrorism in the southern Philippines.

### A Deeper Look at the Founding of the ASG

Analysts traditionally trace the evolution of the ASG to Abdurajak Janjalani, who reportedly founded the group in the early 1990s. While there is no doubt that the ASG's original ideological foundation is attributed to the political and religious ideas of Abdurajak, what he actually organized was a group called al-Harakatul al-Islamiyyah (AHAI) or the Islamic Movement, whose original members were drawn from his followers in Jamaa Tableegh, an Islamic propagation group that he formed in Basilan in the early 1980s.<sup>1</sup> Abdurajak officially declared

the creation of AHAH in 1989 to pursue *Jihad Fi Sabilillah*, defined as "fighting and dying for the cause of Islam."<sup>2</sup> Yet it was only in 1993 when AHAH formally organized with Abdurajak as the *amir*.<sup>3</sup>

Since the formal launch of AHAH in 1989, Abdurajak delivered several *khutbahs* or sermons and released several *fatawa* using the *nom-de-guerre* "Abu Sayyaf," in honor of Afghan resistance fighter Abdul Rasul Sayyaf.<sup>4</sup> While Abdurajak idolized this Afghan leader, the suggestion that Abdurajak was an Afghan war veteran is still a subject for verification.<sup>5</sup> Some living Filipino Afghan war veterans, for example, have challenged the claim that Abdurajak actually fought in the Afghan war—arguing instead that it was his younger brother, Hector, who participated in the conflict.<sup>6</sup>

Abdurajak's *khutbahs* and *fatawa* became popular not only in Basilan but also in Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Zamboanga City. His popularity caught the ire of police and military authorities because Abdurajak was associated with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), a group that declared jihad against the Philippine government. Since Abdurajak used the pen name "Abu Sayyaf," the military described his followers as a group of Abu Sayyaf, which was popularized in media as the Abu Sayyaf Group, or ASG. The popularity of this group spread widely in Mindanao and was locally known as Juma'a Abu Sayyaf. In August 1991, Abdurajak publicly used the name ASG in connection with the bombing of the *MV Doulos*, a Christian missionary ship docked at the Zamboanga City port.<sup>7</sup>

### From Islamic Movement to a Bandit Group

From an Islamic movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the ASG received the label of a bandit group from the

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Personal interview, Noor Muog, former member of the Abu Sayyaf Group, April 8, 2010.

6 There is need to conduct research on the life and stories of Filipino Muslim veterans of the Afghan war. Some have died, some have been imprisoned but there are still remaining veterans all over Mindanao. There are a few staying in Muslim communities in Manila trying to make a living peacefully.

7 "Abu Sayyaf Kidnappings, Bombings and Other Attacks," GMA News.tv, August 23, 2007.

1 For a more detailed history, see Rommel C. Banlaoi, "The Abu Sayyaf Group and Terrorism in the Southern Philippines Seven Years After 9/11: Threat and Response," Philippine Institute for Political Violence and Terrorism Research, September 2008.

Philippine government for partaking in several bombing, extortion and kidnap-for-ransom activities. Although the ASG received initial funding from al-Qa`ida in the mid-1990s through the activities of Muhammad Jamal Khalifah, external funding was cut off when Philippine authorities discovered Khalifah's clandestine operations in the country.<sup>8</sup>

To mobilize resources, the ASG resorted to a kidnap-for-ransom spree in the late 1990s. The ASG's most publicized kidnap-for-ransom activities were the March 2000 attacks in elementary schools in Basilan,<sup>9</sup> the April 2000 attack at the Sipadan resort of Malaysia<sup>10</sup> and the May 2001 attack at the Dos Palmas resort of Palawan.<sup>11</sup> These attacks prompted the Philippine government to describe the ASG as a group of bandits interested in money-making through kidnapping activities. As a result of limited foreign funding since 9/11, the ASG has relied on kidnapping activities as its major source of funding—this continues today.<sup>12</sup> Other sources of its funding come from extortion activities (disguised as *zakat*, or alms giving), counterfeiting of goods, illegal drug sales or serving as bodyguards for local politicians.<sup>13</sup>

8 The discovery is fully described in the report, "The Islamic Fundamentalist/Extremist Movements in the Philippines and their Links with International Terrorist Organizations," December 1994, produced by the Special Investigation Group-Intelligence Command of the Philippine National Police headed by Rodolfo B. Mendoza, Jr.

9 For an excellent account, see Jose Torres Jr., *Into the Mountains: Hostaged by the Abu Sayyaf* (Quezon City: Clar-etian Publications, 2001).

10 For first-hand accounts of this incident, see Roberto N. Aventajado, *140 Days of Terror: In the Clutches of the Abu Sayyaf* (Pasig City: Anvil, 2004) and Werner Wal-lert, *Hostage Terror: Abducted by the Abu Sayyaf* (Singa-pore: Marshall Cavendish, 2009).

11 For a gripping account of her tragedy in this attack, see Gracia Burnham, *In the Presence of My Enemies* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2003).

12 Rodolfo B. Mendoza, Jr., "The Evolution of Terrorist Financing in the Philippines," presented at the Interna-tional Conference in Countering the Financing of Ter-rorism at the Sulu Hotel, Philippines on July 7-8, 2008; Personal interview, Major General Benjamin Dolorfino, Commander of the Western Command of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, Zamboanga City, Philippines, March 25, 2010.

13 Personal interview, Rear Admiral Alexander Pama, Commander of Naval Forces Western Mindanao of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, Zamboanga City, Phil-

### From a Bandit Group to a Terrorist Group

The aftermath of 9/11, however, resulted in the redesignation of the ASG from a bandit group to a terrorist group. The United States listed the ASG as a foreign terrorist organization, justifying the deployment of U.S. troops to the southern Philippines to assist and train the Philippine military in countering the threat. Since 9/11, the ASG has engaged in a series of terrorist activities such as the Davao International Airport bombing in March 2003 that killed 21 people, the *Superferry 14* bombing in February 2004 that killed 116 people and the Valentine's Day bombing in February 2005 that killed 20 people.<sup>14</sup> During this period, the ASG engaged in several bombing activities that were hallmarks of terrorism rather than banditry.<sup>15</sup>

ASG's bomb-making skills were acquired through joint training with Jemaah Islamiya (JI) operatives in the southern Philippines. Dulmatin and Umar Patek, alleged masterminds of the 2002 Bali bombing, have been identified by Philippine intelligence authorities as key trainers of the ASG on the manufacture and use of improvised explosive devices.<sup>16</sup> Dulmatin and Umar Patek trained some ASG members with members of the Special Operations Group (SOG) of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

### From Terrorist Group to Bandit Group Again

When the Philippine military waged Oplan Ultimatum in August 2006 as a counterterrorism offensive to eliminate the ASG, it led to the demise of key ASG leaders, particularly Khadaffy Janjalani and Jainal Antel Sali, Jr. (also known as Abu Solaiman). The success of Oplan Ultimatum led to the drastic decline of ASG membership

to an estimated 200 members at the conclusion of the campaign in 2007.<sup>17</sup>

Yet the ASG was able to recover its membership when it mounted a series of kidnapping activities in 2008. This allowed the group to amass money, which attracted Muslim youth to join the spree. The massive kidnapping activities of the ASG started in June 2008 with the abduction of well-known Filipina journalist, Ces Drilon, and her cameraman. This was followed by the kidnappings of three workers of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in January 2009 and two Chinese nationals in November 2009. In between those dates, several local residents were kidnapped, with one local teacher in Jolo beheaded in November 2009.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the ASG degenerated into a bandit group again.

With money in their pockets resulting from several ransom payments, the ASG was able to accommodate younger recruits not interested in ideology, but in guns and money. Muslim parents in impoverished villages of BASULTA even volunteered their sons to join the ASG in exchange for a monthly supply of rice and financial support to the family of around \$200.<sup>19</sup> Some fathers even reportedly traded their sons for guns.<sup>20</sup> There were cases where young recruits joined the ASG as a status symbol against ordinary gangs in their communities. Some entered the ASG as a result of "pot" (marijuana) sessions with members.<sup>21</sup> There are a few who joined the ASG to exact revenge for the deaths of their loved ones killed by police or military forces. There are also members who joined the ASG due to clan conflicts (known as *rido*), which is prevalent in Mindanao.<sup>22</sup>

ippines, March 24, 2010.

14 For details on these attacks, see Enrico Antonio La Vina and Lilita Balane, "Timeline: The Abu Sayyaf Atrocities," Newsbreak Online, March 31, 2009.

15 For detailed analysis, see Rommel C. Banlaoi, "The Abu Sayyaf Group: From Mere Banditry to Genuine Ter-rorism," in Daljit Singh and Lorraine Salazar eds., *South-east Asian Affairs 2006* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006), pp. 247-264.

16 Dulmatin was killed in Indonesia on March 9, 2010. Umar Patek is believed to have left the Philippines, but there are reports that he is still in Jolo, Sulu in the south-ern Philippines.

17 Rodolfo B. Mendoza, "Updates on Terrorist Organiza-tions in the Philippines," lecture delivered at the Brunei Darussalam Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, December 3, 2009.

18 "Teacher Beheaded in Philippines," BBC, November 9, 2009.

19 Personal interview, senior intelligence officer, Armed Forces of the Philippines, Zamboanga City, Philippines, March 25, 2010.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Wilfredo Magno Torres III ed., *Rido: Clan Feuding and Conflict Management in Mindanao* (Makati City: The Asia Foundation, 2007).

### Sources of ASG Resilience

As of April 2010, the ASG has an estimated 445 members, 79% of whom are 30-years-old and younger.<sup>23</sup> According to the Philippine government, Sulu represents the largest membership of 200 followed by 130 in Basilan, 90 in Zamboanga City, 20 in Tawi-Tawi and five in Marawi City.<sup>24</sup> The ASG has become a resilient group because it is able to replenish its membership from affected and influenced villages in BASULTA through material inducements. In Sulu alone, 46% or 115 of its total 251 villages are affected by the ASG.<sup>25</sup> In Basilan, 25% of its 187 villages are affected by ASG.<sup>26</sup> In other words, the ASG has a reservoir of new recruits that provide the group its staying power.

Aside from this reservoir, ASG leaders have also mastered the skills of conniving with ordinary criminal groups in their operational areas to mount kidnapping and other criminal activities. The ASG has recognized field commanders who are known bandits in the community. ASG commander Alpader Parad, who was killed in February 2010, was a known kidnapper rather than an ideological leader in Sulu. Other field commanders of the ASG are also leaders of notorious criminal gangs in BASULTA who are engaged in piracy, arms smuggling, drugs trafficking and counterfeiting of goods.

Furthermore, some ASG field commanders are protected by local politicians who also benefit from the illegal activities of the group—using ASG members as part of their private militias.<sup>27</sup> Although the Philippine

government has established a commission to dismantle private armies, it remains to be seen if the commission can fulfill its mandate. According to the Philippine National Police, there are more than 130 private armies in the entire country, in addition to rebel groups moonlighting as partisan armed militias of local politicians.<sup>28</sup> ASG members who are not part of the private army of a local politician offer their services as “thugs for hire,” particularly during election seasons.

In other words, the ASG has become an entrepreneur of violence with more of its members interested in pursuing money rather than a violent, Islamist ideology. While other commanders still have the illusion of waging jihad to establish an Islamic state in the southern Philippines, these individuals are a minority, usually those who studied in Islamic schools in the Philippines and abroad. Individuals such as Yasser Igasan, Khair Mundos and Isnilon Hapilon fit the description of ideological leaders. Yet Igasan, who is the nominal *amir* of the ASG, remains a jihadist but lacks loyal armed followers to promote his mission. Mundos, who is leading the ASG in Basilan, also lacks followers who are committed jihadists. Most of Mundos' followers are bandits who are not interested in pursuing jihad. Hapilon, who is leading some of the group in Sulu, is overpowered by other ASG field commanders who are more interested in money generation. In short, the majority of ASG members are not motivated by the promise of an Islamic state or the virtue of jihad, but by the allure of money and power that comes from the barrel of a gun.

The ASG, therefore, has become a resilient group because its existence is enmeshed in a complex situation in the southern Philippines where rebels and terrorists connive with ordinary bandits, who collude with local politicians. All these various interests perpetrate violence on an island marred by more than 400 years of ethnic conflict, banditry and rebellion.

### Limits of Countering Terrorism in the Philippines

With this grim reality of violence in the southern Philippines, counterterrorism measures largely based on the use of military muscle will not put an end to the ASG. Military offensives and other variants of Oplan Ultimatum can kill ASG members, but not end the ASG as a resilient group.

The ASG is a symbol of the complexities of armed violence in the southern Philippines that interact with issues of banditry, terrorism, rebellion, separatism, clan conflict, ethnic conflict and warlordism. The continuous entry of foreign jihadists to the southern Philippines only compounds these issues, as radical foreigners subvert the minds of the locals, imbuing them with a violent Islamist ideology. Moreover, they also train local fighters in sophisticated bomb-making skills. Only effective governance can limit ethnic conflict, banditry and rebellion. A strong civilian government sincere in nation-building is needed to finally put an end to the ASG by resolving the ethnic and political disputes plaguing the region.

*Rommel C. Banlaoi is the Executive Director of the Philippine Institute for Peace, Violence and Terrorism Research, an independent think-tank. He was former professor of political science and international relations at the National Defense College of the Philippines and was a consultant at the Department of National Defense and National Counter Terrorism Action Group of the Philippine Anti-Terrorism Council. He is currently lecturing at the Command and General Staff College of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and is a Senior Fellow at the Yuchengco Center of De La Salle University. He is the author of Philippine Security in the Age of Terror (2010), Counter-Terrorism Measures in Southeast Asia: How Effective Are They (2009) and War on Terrorism In Southeast Asia (2004). He is currently working on a book project on the Abu Sayyaf Group.*

<sup>23</sup> Rommel C. Banlaoi, “Evolving Threats of Terrorism in Southeast Asia,” lecture presented at the 4th Asia Pacific Program for Senior National Security Officers organized by the Center for Excellence in National Security, Singapore, April 13, 2010. For the estimates on ASG cadre, see Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Armed Forces of the Philippines, March 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Armed Forces of the Philippines, March 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Local politicians allegedly received commissions from ransom payments and proceeds from illicit trafficking of arms and drugs. This idea was also articulated by National Security Adviser and Acting Defense Secretary Norberto Gonzales. Also see Jocelyn Uy, “Abu Sayyaf Men Maybe Moonlighting at Private Armies—Defense

Execs,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, April 15, 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Jesus A. Versosa, “The PNP’s Role in Upholding the Law Against Private Armed Groups,” *Philippine National Police*, January 27, 2010.



## Recent Highlights in Terrorist Activity

April 1, 2010 (UNITED STATES): The U.S. Treasury Department announced sanctions against Ahmad Khalaf Shabib al-Dulaymi, who is suspected of smuggling weapons to Iraq and having ties to Usama bin Ladin. Al-Dulaymi is a native of Falluja, but lives in London. The Treasury Department also placed sanctions on Atilla Selek who is currently in a German jail for plotting attacks on U.S. soldiers and civilians in Germany. Selek is of Turkish descent. – *AFP, April 1*

April 1, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): An explosion killed one member of the NATO-led international force in southern Afghanistan. – *Reuters, April 1*

April 2, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): Three German soldiers were killed during fighting in Kunduz Province. – *Reuters, April 2*

April 3, 2010 (PAKISTAN): Pakistani police said that they killed eight suspected criminals who had ties to Islamist militants on the outskirts of Peshawar. Three policemen were also killed in the fighting. – *Reuters, April 3*

April 3, 2010 (PAKISTAN): Pakistani security forces killed 30 militants in Orakzai Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Six soldiers were also killed in the fighting. – *Reuters, April 3*

April 4, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): A roadside bomb killed four Afghan civilians, including three women, in Ghazni Province. – *Reuters, April 5*

April 4, 2010 (IRAQ): Three car bombs ripped through Baghdad, killing at least 40 people. The bombs targeted the Iranian and German embassies, in addition to the Egyptian Consulate. Authorities blamed the attack on al-Qa`ida in Iraq. – *Los Angeles Times, April 5*

April 4, 2010 (PHILIPPINES): Gunmen possibly belonging to the Abu Sayyaf Group abducted a Swiss-born man from his home in Zamboanga, located in the southern Philippines. Charlie Reith, 72-years-old and a naturalized Filipino, was taken away by boat in

the direction of Basilan Island. – *AFP, April 5*

April 5, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban fighters kidnapped four Afghan policemen after ambushing their convoy in Baghlan Province. The militants also stole a number of police vehicles. – *Reuters, April 5*

April 5, 2010 (PAKISTAN): Multiple militants attempted to storm the U.S. Consulate in Peshawar. The militants detonated a car bomb to destroy the external security post at the diplomatic mission, before trying to drive a second vehicle, carrying two suicide bombers, into the facility. The entrance barrier, however, blocked the vehicle, causing the militants to detonate their explosives prematurely. Other fighters dressed in military fatigues launched rocket-propelled grenades at the building as well. At least five people were killed in the coordinated attack. – *Voice of America, April 5; Los Angeles Times, April 6*

April 5, 2010 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber attacked an Awami National Party political rally in Lower Dir District of the North-West Frontier Province, killing at least 43 people. – *BBC, April 5*

April 5, 2010 (RUSSIA): A suicide bomber killed at least two police officers in Ingushetia, located in Russia's North Caucasus. The bomber targeted a police car in the town of Karabulak. Less than an hour after the suicide bombing, a car bomb exploded in the same area in an attempt to target first responders, causing several injuries. – *New York Times, April 5; Bloomberg, April 5*

April 6, 2010 (IRAQ): At least seven bombings tore through mostly Shi`a neighborhoods in Baghdad, killing at least 35 people. – *Washington Post, April 7*

April 6, 2010 (ISRAEL): A leading al-Qa`ida operative, Salah al-Karawi, accused Lebanese militant group Hizb Allah of "protecting Israel." According to al-Karawi, "They [Hizb Allah] don't allow us to act, but they don't strike Israel themselves," stating that the Lebanese Shi`a group was "nothing more than protectors of the Jews. It is the biggest hurdle delaying our

activity on the ground against Israel." – *Haaretz, April 6*

April 7, 2010 (GLOBAL): U.S. Treasury Department official David Cohen announced that al-Qa`ida "is now in the worst financial shape it has been in for years." He also said, "We have seen financial networks that were the source of Al-Qaeda's financing, particularly out of Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Gulf, increasingly disrupted." Cohen warned, however, that the Taliban has enough financing to pose a threat to civilians and international forces in Afghanistan. "The Taliban still has the funding necessary to hold territory, buy allegiance and fundamentally challenge our core national security objective" of bringing stability to Afghanistan, he explained. – *Bloomberg, April 7*

April 7, 2010 (UNITED STATES): Various press reports, citing U.S. officials, claim that the Obama administration has "authorized the CIA to capture or kill a U.S.-born radical Muslim cleric alleged to be an al-Qaida operative." The cleric has been identified as Anwar al-`Awlaqi, who is believed to be hiding in Yemen. – *Voice of America, April 7*

April 8, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): U.S. soldier Bowe Bergdahl, who was captured by Taliban fighters in June 2009, appeared in a new Taliban propaganda video posted to Islamist web forums. It is not clear when the video was filmed. – *Telegraph, April 8*

April 8, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban fighters killed a tribal elder, Haji Abdul Samad, along with four other people in Marja, located in Helmand Province. – *Reuters, April 9*

April 8, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan police arrested five members of a Taliban bomb squad, preventing a terrorist attack in Kabul. According to the Afghan Interior Ministry, the men, armed with firearms and suicide vests, were arrested as they tried to drive into the center of the capital. – *Daily Times, April 9*

April 9, 2010 (UNITED STATES): According to the *Washington Post*, "U.S. District Court Judge James Robertson ruled that Mohamedou Ould Slahi, a Mauritanian, must be released from custody because the government was unable to prove that at the time of his capture he was part of al-Qaeda or was providing any support to the organization." Slahi is currently being held at Guantanamo Bay. – *Washington Post*, April 10

April 9, 2010 (SOMALIA): Somalia's al-Shabab insurgent group forced the BBC off the air in regions they control, accusing the network of spreading Christian propaganda. According to the group, the "BBC is owned by England and it spreads (a) colonial and Christian agenda in the Muslim world. BBC fights Islam...it is against the Islamic administration in Somalia." Voice of America was also taken off the air. – *Reuters*, April 9; *Voice of America*, April 9

April 10, 2010 (YEMEN): The powerful al-Awaliq tribe in Yemen threatened violence against anyone trying to harm the radical, U.S.-born cleric Anwar al-Awlaqi. According to Agence France-Presse, "A US official said on Wednesday that President Barack Obama's administration had authorised the targeted killing of the cleric, even though he is an American citizen." The tribe, which is heavily armed, is active in Yemen's Abyan and Shabwa provinces. – *AFP*, April 10

April 11, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban fighters threatened to execute two French journalist hostages unless a prisoner exchange is organized. The Taliban are demanding the French government negotiate the release of prisoners held by U.S. and Afghan authorities. – *Independent Online*, April 12

April 12, 2010 (GLOBAL): President Barack Obama's top anti-terrorism homeland security adviser, John Brennan, warned that "al-Qaeda has been engaged in the effort to acquire a nuclear weapon for over 15 years, and its interest remains strong today." He also said, "There have been numerous reports over the years, over the past eight or nine years, about attempts throughout the world to obtain various types of purported material

that is nuclear related. We know that al Qaeda has been involved in a number of these efforts to acquire it. Fortunately, I think they've been scammed a number of times, but we know that they continued to pursue that. We know of individuals within the organization that have been given that responsibility." – *AFP*, April 12; *WhiteHouse.gov*, April 12

April 12, 2010 (IRAQ): A suicide bomber in a vehicle killed a policeman and a civilian in Mosul, the capital of Ninawa Province. The bomber targeted a police patrol. – *AFP*, April 12

April 12, 2010 (PAKISTAN): A suspected U.S. aerial drone killed at least five militants in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. According to a Pakistani security official, the targeted compounds were "owned by local Taliban commander Tariq Khan." – *Dawn*, April 12

April 12, 2010 (PAKISTAN): More than 100 Pakistani Taliban militants attacked a checkpoint in Orakzai Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Pakistan's security forces managed to repulse the insurgents, killing an estimated 38 Taliban fighters. Two Frontier Corps soldiers were also killed. – *New York Times*, April 12

April 12, 2010 (PAKISTAN): Pakistani media announced that a fourth suspect in a plot to bomb New York City was arrested in Pakistan several weeks ago. The plot, which involved Najibullah Zazi, targeted New York City's Grand Central and Times Square subway stations. – *Reuters*, April 13

April 13, 2010 (UNITED STATES): U.S. President Barack Obama announced an executive order blocking any U.S. assets of the Somali insurgent group al-Shabab. – *Reuters*, April 14

April 13, 2010 (PHILIPPINES): Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) militants disguised as police and military troops launched an attack in Isabela City on Basilan Island in the southern Philippines, killing at least eight people. Three Philippine Marines were among the dead. Philippine authorities suggested that the ASG fighters may

have been working on behalf of local political figures. – *Manila Standard*, April 14; *Philippine Inquirer*, April 15

April 14, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): U.S. soldiers withdrew from the Korengal Valley, located in Afghanistan's Kunar Province. The valley is a Taliban stronghold, and its rugged mountainous terrain caters to the Taliban's guerrilla tactics. U.S. General Stanley A. McChrystal said, "The battle changes, the war changes. If you don't understand the dynamics, you have no chance of getting it right. We've been slower here [in Korengal] than I would have liked." – *BBC*, April 14; *New York Times*, April 14

April 14, 2010 (IRAQ): A U.S. counterterrorism official told reporters that Iraqi authorities uncovered plans by al-Qaeda to fly hijacked planes into Iraq's Shi'a mosques. It is not clear how far the plan had advanced, but the potential targets reportedly included holy sites in Najaf and Karbala. – *AFP*, April 14; *Christian Science Monitor*, April 15

April 15, 2010 (UNITED STATES): Robert Mueller, the head of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, warned U.S. lawmakers about the threat from unaffiliated extremists, or "lone wolf" terrorists. "Al-Qaeda and its affiliates are still committed to striking us in the United States," he said. "Home-grown and lone-wolf extremists pose an equally serious threat." According to Mueller, "These terrorist threats are diverse, far-reaching and ever-changing, and to combat these threats, the FBI must sustain our overseas contingency operations and engage our intelligence and law enforcement partners both here at home and abroad." – *AFP*, April 15

April 15, 2010 (UNITED STATES): The U.S. Treasury Department imposed sanctions on two "high-profile" Pakistani trust fund chiefs who are allegedly linked to terrorism. The men were identified as Mohammed Mazhar, the director of al-Akhtar Trust, and Mufti Abdul Rahim, the head of al-Rashid Trust. – *AFP*, April 15

April 15, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): Two car bombs exploded in downtown Kandahar, killing at least two people. Early reports suggested that the second bomb targeted a compound housing Western workers. – *New York Times*, April 15

April 15, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban fighters killed four German soldiers in a rocket attack in Baghlan Province. – *New York Times*, April 15

April 15, 2010 (IRAQ): Gunmen stormed into a home in Mosul, killing four people, including three women. – *Reuters*, April 15

April 16, 2010 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives inside a civil hospital in Quetta, the capital of Baluchistan Province, killing 11 people. It appears that Shi`a Muslims were targeted, as the emergency room was filled with friends and family members of a Shi`a bank manager killed earlier in the day. – *Daily Times*, April 17

April 16, 2010 (PAKISTAN): At least four militants were killed in a U.S. aerial drone strike in North Waziristan Agency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. – *AFP*, April 16

April 16, 2010 (NORTH AFRICA): Al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) released an Italian couple who has been held hostage since December 2009. The couple was kidnapped in Mauritania, but released in Mali. – *BBC*, April 16

April 17, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): According to the *Washington Post*, “The Taliban has begun regularly targeting U.S. government contractors in southern Afghanistan, stepping up use of a tactic that is rattling participating firms and could undermine development projects intended to stem the insurgency...Within the past month, there have been at least five attacks in Helmand and Kandahar provinces against employees of U.S. Agency for International Development contractors who are running agricultural projects, building roads, maintaining power plants and working with local officials.” – *Washington Post*, April 17

April 17, 2010 (PAKISTAN): Two male suicide bombers disguised in burqas attacked a refugee camp in Kohat District of the North-West Frontier Province, killing at least 41 people. – *Los Angeles Times*, April 17; *AFP*, April 17

April 18, 2010 (IRAQ): U.S. and Iraqi forces killed Abu Ayyub al-Masri (also known as Abu Hamza al-Muhajir), the head of al-Qa`ida in Iraq (AQI), in addition to Abu `Umar al-Baghdadi, the head of the Islamic State of Iraq. U.S. General Ray Odierno called the deaths “potentially the most significant blow to Al Qaeda in Iraq since the beginning of the insurgency.” AQI later confirmed the deaths. According to the *Washington Post*, “Acting on a tip they received in recent days, Iraqi and U.S. Special Forces descended on a safe house shared by the leaders of the Sunni Muslim insurgent group in Tikrit, in northern Iraq...As the troops approached the house, an explosion occurred inside, likely the result of a suicide bombing...American forces then quickly dropped a bomb on the house, U.S. officials said.” – *Los Angeles Times*, April 20; *Voice of America*, April 25; *Washington Post*, April 20

April 18, 2010 (IRAQ): General Ray Odierno, the head of U.S. forces in Iraq, said he was confident that he would be able to draw down U.S. troops by an end-of-August deadline. “We are...on target to be at 50,000 [troops] by August,” he told Fox News. “We’re at about 95,000 today...our plans are intact. I feel very comfortable with our plan. And unless something unforeseen and disastrous happens, I fully expect us to be at 50,000 by the 1st of September.” – *Reuters*, April 18

April 18, 2010 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber detonated his explosives-laden vehicle near the Belly Tang Police Station in Kohat District of the North-West Frontier Province. The blast killed at least seven people. – *The Nation*, April 19; *Voice of America*, April 18

April 19, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): Afghan police and intelligence officials announced that they prevented a planned commando-style raid by Taliban insurgents in Kabul. Nine would-be suicide bombers were arrested. The militants apparently wanted to attack strategic government

and foreign targets in the capital. – *Reuters*, April 19; *AFP*, April 19

April 19, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): Taliban gunmen shot dead the deputy mayor of Kandahar city, Azizullah Yarmal, while he was praying at a mosque. – *BBC*, April 20

April 19, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): A bomb attached to the back of a donkey exploded in Kandahar city, killing three children. – *Reuters*, April 19

April 19, 2010 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber targeted a crowded market in Peshawar, killing at least 23 people. – *BBC*, April 19

April 20, 2010 (IRAQ): Iraqi and U.S. troops killed a regional al-Qa`ida in Iraq leader. Hazim Ilyas Abdallah al-Khafaji (also known as Yasir al-Hambali) was killed during the morning operation in Ninawa Province. – *USA Today*, April 20; *AFP*, April 20

April 22, 2010 (PAKISTAN): Pakistani Taliban militants ambushed a military convoy in North Waziristan Agency, killing seven soldiers. – *New York Times*, April 23

April 22, 2010 (NIGER): Police in Niger believe that armed gunmen linked to al-Qa`ida in the Islamic Maghreb kidnapped one Frenchman and one Algerian citizen in the north of the country. – *AP*, April 23

April 23, 2010 (UNITED STATES): Taxi driver Zarein Ahmedzay pleaded guilty in a New York court to conspiring to use weapons of mass destruction, conspiring to commit murder in a foreign country and providing material support to Usama bin Ladin’s al-Qa`ida network. Ahmedzay, a U.S. citizen, is a former school classmate of Najibullah Zazi, who pleaded guilty to similar charges in February 2010. Assistant U.S. Attorney Jeffrey Knox also for the first time named the senior al-Qa`ida operatives involved in the case, identifying them as Salah al-Somali and Rashid Rauf. Al-Somali is the head of international operations for al-Qa`ida and was killed in a U.S. drone strike in December 2009. – *Reuters*, April 23; *AP*, April 24



April 23, 2010 (IRAQ): A series of car bombs exploded outside Shi'a mosques in Baghdad, killing at least 69 people. At least 10 bombs were detonated. – *Washington Post*, April 24; *AP*, April 23

April 24, 2010 (PAKISTAN): A car bomber targeted a prison van in Lower Dir District of the North-West Frontier Province, wounding at least 10 policemen. No prisoners were in the van at the time. – *AP*, April 24

April 24, 2010 (PAKISTAN): A bomb tore through a bakery in the town of Sibi, located in Baluchistan Province. Six people were wounded. – *Reuters*, April 24

April 24, 2010 (PAKISTAN): The Pakistani Taliban apparently issued a "last warning" to media to "stop working as an ally" of the Pakistani government and the army. – *Reuters*, April 24

April 25, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber killed four people in an attack at a bazaar in Zabul Province. – *BBC*, April 25

April 25, 2010 (PAKISTAN): Militants reportedly attacked a checkpoint in Orakzai Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, but were rebuffed by Pakistan's security forces. Local officials say that nine militants were killed in the firefight. – *AP*, April 25

April 26, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): A NATO airstrike killed a senior Taliban commander and two advisers in Kunduz Province. – *Voice of America*, April 26

April 26, 2010 (YEMEN): A suicide bomber attempted to kill Britain's ambassador to Yemen as he traveled to work in an armored vehicle. The ambassador, Timothy Torlot, was uninjured in the attack, which occurred a few hundred yards from the popular Movenpick Hotel in Sana'a. Yemeni police quickly arrested several al-Qa`ida suspects in connection with the attack. – *Deutsche Press Agency*, April 26; *Christian Science Monitor*, April 26; *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, April 28

April 26, 2010 (MOROCCO): Morocco's Interior Ministry announced that it had broken up an al-Qa`ida-linked militant cell planning attacks throughout the country. A total of 24 militants belonged to the cell. – *Voice of America*, April 26

April 27, 2010 (GLOBAL): Anwar al-Awlaki, an American-born Muslim cleric now based in Yemen, appeared in a new video released by al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). According to CNN, "In the video released to media outlets, al-Awlaki said the goal of the U.S. military in Afghanistan and Iraq is to get Muslims to fight each other by blaming market bombings on Islamic militants...A top Yemen government official said al-Awlaki met with Umar Farouk AbdulMutallab, who has been charged in a botched attempt to blow up a Northwest Airlines passenger jet en route from Amsterdam, Netherlands, to Detroit, Michigan, on Christmas Day. The attempt to ignite explosives hidden in AbdulMutallab's underwear failed to bring down the plane." – *CNN*, April 27

April 27, 2010 (UNITED STATES): Syed Hashmi, a Pakistan-born U.S. citizen, pleaded guilty in a New York City court to one count of providing material support to a foreign terrorist organization. Hashmi, a former student in New York, admitted that while living in London he helped a friend send waterproof socks, ponchos and sleeping bags to al-Qa`ida fighters in Afghanistan. According to the *New York Times*, "Mr. Hashmi could have received a sentence of 70 years had he been convicted on the four counts he originally faced. As part of his deal, the government will drop three other charges and allow him to plead guilty to one count of conspiracy to provide material support to Al Qaeda, prosecutors said. In a letter, the government said both parties agreed that 15 years would be a reasonable sentence." – *Reuters*, April 27; *New York Times*, April 27

April 27, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): A suicide bomber killed three people near Kandahar Airfield. The attack targeted a compound providing logistical support to NATO forces. – *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*, April 27; *CBS News*, April 27

April 27, 2010 (IRAQ): A roadside bomb killed one U.S. soldier in Diyala Province. – *Reuters*, April 28

April 27, 2010 (SOMALIA): Three suicide attackers drove a truck filled with explosives toward an African Union (AU) peacekeeping base in Mogadishu. AU forces opened fire on the truck, killing all three militants inside. The subsequent explosion, however, wounded two AU soldiers. Al-Shabab claimed responsibility for the attack, and said that it was to avenge the recent deaths of al-Qa`ida's leaders in Iraq. – *Voice of America*, April 27; *UPI*, April 29

April 28, 2010 (IRAQ): Two suspected suicide bombers in vehicles attacked police checkpoints in southern Baghdad, killing five people. – *Reuters*, April 28

April 28, 2010 (IRAQ): A bomb on a pickup truck exploded at the Electricity Ministry, wounding two employees and two bystanders in western Baghdad. – *Reuters*, April 28

April 28, 2010 (PAKISTAN): A suicide bomber in a vehicle attacked a police checkpoint on the outskirts of Peshawar, killing four officers. – *AFP*, April 27

April 29, 2010 (IRAQ): A roadside bomb wounded one U.S. soldier in Baghdad's northern Adhamiya district. – *Reuters*, April 30

April 29, 2010 (PAKISTAN): Pakistani security officials claimed that Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan leader Hakimullah Mehsud is alive, despite reports that he was killed in a U.S. drone strike in January 2010. – *Los Angeles Times*, April 29

April 29, 2010 (RUSSIA): A suicide bomber killed two police officers in Russia's Dagestan region. – *AP*, April 29

April 30, 2010 (GLOBAL): Islamist web forums hosted a new audio message purportedly containing the voice of Humam al-Balawi, the Jordanian doctor who killed seven CIA agents in eastern Afghanistan in December 2009. Al-Sahab, which produced the audio/video message, announced al-Badawi with subtitles, reading, "A message that was delivered on the

## CTC Sentinel Staff

### Editor-in-Chief

Erich Marquardt  
Senior Editor, CTC

### Editorial Board

COL Michael J. Meese, Ph.D.  
Department Head  
Department of Social Sciences (West Point)

COL Cindy R. Jebb, Ph.D.  
Deputy Department Head  
Department of Social Sciences (West Point)

LTC Reid Sawyer  
Director, CTC

Christopher Heffelfinger  
FBI Fellow, CTC

### CONTACT

Combating Terrorism Center  
U.S. Military Academy  
607 Cullum Road, Lincoln Hall  
West Point, NY 10996  
Phone: (845) 667-6383  
Email: [sentinel@usma.edu](mailto:sentinel@usma.edu)  
Web: [www.ctc.usma.edu/sentinel/](http://www.ctc.usma.edu/sentinel/)

\* For Press Inquiries: (845) 667-6383

### SUPPORT

The Combating Terrorism Center would like to express its gratitude to its financial supporters, for without their support and shared vision of the Center products like the CTC Sentinel could not be produced. If you are interested in learning more about how to support the Combating Terrorism Center, please visit <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/support/> or call Wayne Richardson at West Point's Association of Graduates at 845-446-1553.

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and not of the U.S. Military Academy, the Department of the Army, or any other agency of the U.S. Government.

night before his martyrdom operation against the American intelligence in Khost." – *CNN, April 30*

April 30, 2010 (UNITED STATES): Prosecutors charged two New York men—Wesam El-Hanafi and Sabirhan Hasanoff—with conspiracy to provide material support to Usama bin Ladin's al-Qa`ida network. The men allegedly provided computer expertise and purchased seven watches online for al-Qa`ida. El-Hanafi was born in Brooklyn, while Hasanoff is a dual U.S.-Australian citizen. – *Reuters, April 30*

April 30, 2010 (AFGHANISTAN): Explosives planted on a bicycle wounded five Afghan civilians in Musa Qala district of southern Helmand Province. – *Reuters, April 30*

April 30, 2010 (IRAQ): Gunmen threw a hand grenade at a U.S. military patrol in Hawija, north of Baghdad. One Iraqi civilian was wounded. – *Reuters, April 30*

April 30, 2010 (PAKISTAN): Khalid Khwaja, a former official in Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), was found dead in North Waziristan Agency with gunshot wounds to the head and chest. Khwaja was kidnapped on March 26 by a group calling itself the "Asian Tigers." Khwaja's death was greeted with some surprise, as he had deep connections to the Taliban and al-Qa`ida. The group is still holding hostage two other individuals kidnapped with Khwaja: retired Colonel Amir Sultan Tarar and British journalist Asad Qureshi. – *Dawn, April 30; New York Times, April 30*